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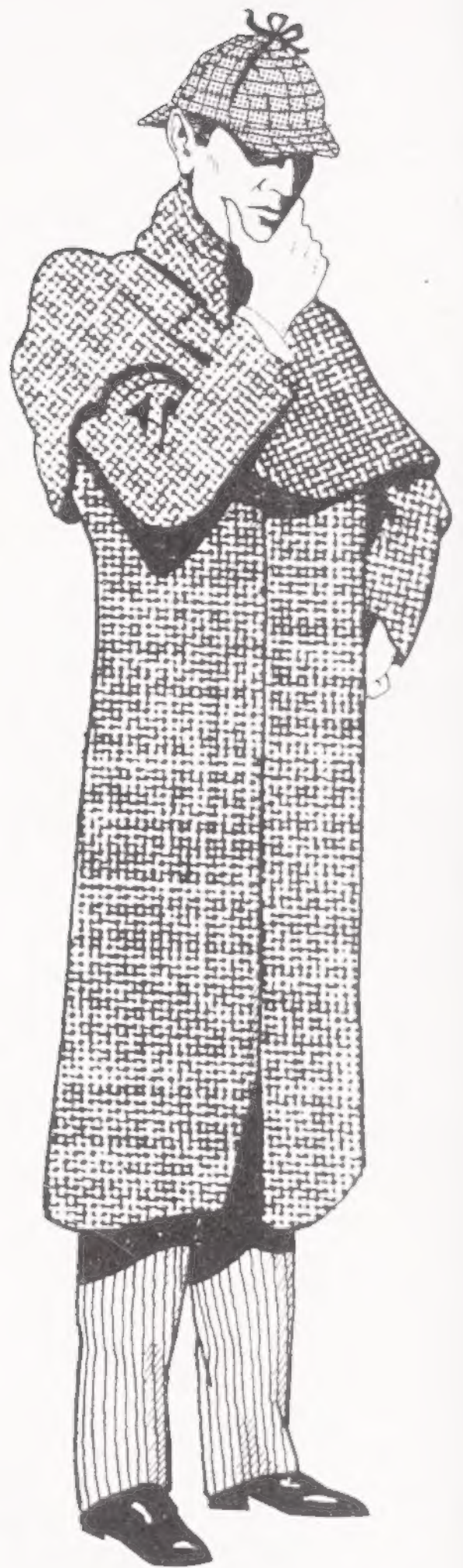
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AUGUST DERLETH

The
Solar Pons Omnibus

VOLUME TWO

EDITED BY BASIL COPPER
WITH DRAWINGS BY FRANK UTPATEL

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The Solar Pons Omnibus

The Adventure of the Three Red Dwarfs

THE AFFAIR of the Three Red Dwarfs, as it is chronicled in my notebooks, stands among those cases most typical of Solar Pons's method, and ranks, in the brevity of its problem and the almost pedestrian acuteness of Pons's observation, with the adventure of the Black Narcissus, which it followed. It was one of those cases marked by unusual features which Inspector Jamison of Scotland Yard habitually brought to the attention of "the Sherlock Holmes of Praed Street," as the papers were even then beginning to call Pons.

Jamison came to our lodgings at 7 Praed Street one afternoon in early May, following a period of enforced idleness which had irked Pons, coming into the room puffing heavily, his chubby face red with the exertion of climbing the stairs.

"Ah," murmured Pons, eyeing him with delight, "there's been a murder."

Jamison followed Pons's gaze to the small spot of blood on his trousers at the knee.

"The body was on the floor, I see," Pons continued, "and since it bled profusely, I should not be surprised to learn that the victim was stabbed to death."

Jamison looked at Pons in admiration and amazement.

"Was it a man or a woman?" asked Pons.

"A man," replied Jamison hurriedly. "But how you heard, I don't know."

An expression of annoyance crossed Pons's face. "You have only to use your eyes, Jamison," he retorted. "Those stains on your trousers are obviously bloodstains. The condition of your knees shows you to have been creeping about on the floor. The fact that you were creeping about on a floor where you stained your trousers with blood suggests that there has been a murder rather than a suicide, for in the latter case you would not have come to me. If there was so much blood on the floor that you could not avoid it in your examination of the body, I infer that the victim bled profusely, and that in turn leads me to suspect that a knife was used and drawn from the wound."

Jamison nodded glumly.

"Suppose you tell us about it," suggested Pons.

"The matter is right in your line," began Jamison.

"And have you given up, then?"

"Certainly not. I have my own theory of the crime."

"So? Let us have the details." Pons lit his pipe and sat back in his chair, contemplating Jamison in silence.

"Well, it's like this, Pons," began Jamison. "You know those two authors – the collaborators – up in St. John's Wood? The same two the papers had so much about a few days past?"

"Brighton and Lane, eh? Writers of realistic fiction, and quite prolific, I believe. I am under the impression that Lane is also an artist and has had several exhibitions. They recently published a monograph on chess which struck me as rather well done. Which was murdered?"

"Lane, the younger of the two. Stabbed twice. The first wound was not fatal, but the second must have killed him almost at once, for it penetrated the heart. In the second wound we found the weapon – an Italian stiletto, his own property. Besides the wounds we found some suspicious bruises on his head and on his left wrist. There was nothing about that could have made the marks nor was there anything he could have hit while falling, for he lay well away from the wall, toward the middle of the room, and there was no furniture near him."

"Any sign of a struggle?" interrupted Pons.

"None. The room is as spick and span as if nothing had ever happened there – not a mark. Just between us, it's my idea that Lane killed himself."

Pons looked at Jamison incredulously. "Don't you think that it would be more reasonable to believe that Lane would have made sure the first time, had he wished to kill himself?"

"I don't know. The circumstances are peculiar. Brighton called us. He was quite incoherent, and said that something had happened to Lane, and that we'd better come at once. When we got there, we found him nervous as a cat. He was pacing the floor holding a paintbrush in one hand and a pot of paint in the other."

"Most singular," murmured Pons. "You asked him about it, I hope?"

"Oh, yes. He explained that he'd been painting, and indeed, we could see his work in the kitchenette."

"Hm!" said Pons. He pondered a moment in silence. Then he asked, "What was the doctor's conclusion?"

"He tends toward murder – as I said, I don't agree. Lane had

been dead an hour when we arrived."

"An hour!" exclaimed Pons. "And where was Brighton all this time?"

"Oh, everything's satisfactory. Brighton was pottering around in the garden all the time, and only discovered his colleague when he entered the house. The body was on the floor of the drawing-room looking out on St. John's Wood terrace. He called us directly after finding Lane."

"Of course, you asked him whether he had heard a disturbance in the house?"

"Yes, certainly. He had heard nothing. As a matter of fact, he did not even know that Lane was in the house, for he had gone out early in the morning, and Brighton had not heard him come in."

Pons considered this. "The body, you say," he went on presently, "bears bruises, which look as if they might have been inflicted in a struggle. Yet there are neither signs of a struggle in the room, nor is there any evidence of noise suggesting that there was a struggle. Decidedly perplexing. Have you examined into the motive of the murder?"

Jamison nodded. "Yes, we've unearthed a motive, Pons. It was Brighton who set us on to that. It seems that over a month ago Lane wrote an article on a fellow journalist, dished him up pretty well, I'm afraid. Of course, no names were mentioned, but for those in the know, the journalist is pretty obvious so I am given to understand. At any rate, two weeks ago Lane got a short note from this fellow, telling him that scores would soon be even."

"You have the note?" Pons cut in.

"No. Brighton says that Lane destroyed it; Lane looked on the matter as a joke."

"Of course, you have the man's name?"

"We're not sure of that. Brighton says the fellow Lane had done up was a journalist on the *Mirror* staff - name of John Estenham. But Brighton says he did not see the note, and therefore he doesn't know whether the signature was that of Estenham."

"Estenham?" repeated Pons musingly. "The name is familiar. Did Brighton say is the man a racing correspondent?"

"Why, yes," said Jamison, "it seems to me that Brighton said something about it. Yes, I believe he did."

"Then you may dismiss Estenham from your list of suspects; he was killed three days ago in a motor smash coming back from the Sussex Chase. Have you no other suspects?"

Jamison shook his head. "None. But we haven't gone far with the

inquiry. Brighton says he cannot think of anyone who'd want to harm Lane, and he can't believe that Estenham had a hand in this business."

"We can rule Estenham out," said Pons shortly. "Of course you formed some opinion of how the crime was committed?"

"From the look of things it's pretty obvious," said Jamison. "Lane entered the house, removed his outer clothing, and made himself comfortable in the drawing-room. Shortly after, someone entered from the street—there might have been an argument, a struggle, and Lane was killed. It is either that, or Lane killed himself. If the unknown had seen Lane enter the house, and knew also that Brighton was working in the garden, it would have been a comparatively easy matter to follow and kill Lane."

Pons closed his eyes for a moment in reflection. Abruptly he rose and went over to a wastepaper-basket, in which he began to rummage, and from which he at last extracted a thick book-catalogue, which had come in yesterday's post. With this he returned to his chair. He began to search through the catalogue.

"Ah," he murmured at last, "here we have it. '*Chess . . . Chess and the Human Mind—A Monograph*, by H. C. Brighton, with a commentary by Gerald Lane.' " Pons read for a moment in silence, then he looked up and said, "I think we'll run up to the scene for a bit, eh? What do you say, Parker?"

I nodded. It was a foregone conclusion that the possibility of an adventure with Pons took precedence over anything else I might have in mind.

Our motor-cab drew up before a modern, two-storey house of white stucco, set modestly away from the street. There was a roofed-over terrace at one side of the building, and beyond this, the latticed-in garden could be seen. It was on the terrace that Brighton met us. He made a curious figure as he came rushing from the house clad in a flowing dressing-gown of black silk and scarlet crepe. He was handsome, but his features were somewhat disfigured by the large horn-rimmed glasses he wore.

"Mr. Solar Pons at last," he said in a hurried voice as he came on. "Perhaps now we'll have some light on this horrible affair." He glanced significantly at Jamison.

"Mr. Brighton, I take it?" said Pons dryly.

"Yes—yes, certainly," replied Brighton in a nervous, jerky voice. "I suppose you would like to see the body at once." Then, without giving Pons time to answer, he turned and led the way quickly into

the house though the French doors which were thrown open on the terrace.

Jamison had given us an idea of the position of the body. We saw it now, with a sheet covering it, and beside it stood a constable on guard. Pons nodded silently to the constable, and bent to pull the sheet from Lane's body. The young, fair-haired man lay as Jamison had described him, partly on his side, partly on his back, his right arm flung out, his left turned in toward the body, indicating in its direction the stiletto in the body. Pons looked searchingly at the corpse, throwing an occasional glance at the French doors, through which the murderer might have entered. Then he bent to scrutinize the two bruises of which Jamison had spoken, one on the head, the other on the left wrist. He pondered a moment over the bruise on the wrist, but at last he rose from his crouching position and recovered the body. He stepped carefully away from the bloodstained floor and turned upon the bespectacled author, whose sharp eyes had followed Pons's every move.

"Was Mr. Lane left-handed?" Pons asked abruptly.

"Yes—yes, anyone can tell you," replied Brighton in a breathless voice.

Pons nodded abstractedly and continued, "I understand that you were in the garden prior to your discovery of the body. You were not aware that Mr. Lane was in the house?"

Brighton shook his head. "I had no idea Gerald had returned."

"You heard and saw nothing, then?"

"No. If you care to verify, you'll see that the greater part of the garden extends to the rear of the house, out of sight of the terrace. I was at the extreme end of the garden and neither saw nor heard anything unusual."

"Nothing unusual," repeated Pons. "Did you hear anything usual? Some familiar sound or sounds that struck you, but which you were able to accept unconsciously?"

Brighton appeared to think. "Why, yes, now that you put it that way. There was a peculiar sloshy sound—as if someone were washing something with a soggy rag, slapping the rag against some surface. A sort of dull sound, accompanied occasionally by the noise of running water. This lasted for some length of time, and ceased only when I entered the house."

"What did you think it was?"

"I assumed that one of the neighbours was washing something—their houses are not so very far away—or that Gerald had returned. It did not strike me that the sound was continual for over an hour.

but it must have been, for I remember hearing it but at the same time not noticing it during my work. I heard it, too, when I entered the house."

"Quite so. And what time was it when you entered the house?"

"I think it was just about noon. I couldn't say exactly, but it was between a quarter to twelve and noon."

"Now tell us just what you did when you discovered the body," suggested Pons.

Brighton stuck his hands deep into his pockets. "Of course," he began, "I was deeply shocked, more than I can say. Gerald and I have been living together for six months, and we had become quite attached to each other."

"You found the body at noon," Pons cut in. "Exactly what did you do?"

"I called Scotland Yard at once," replied Brighton in an injured voice which Pons affected not to notice.

"Very good," interrupted Pons again. "You called the Yard, and Jamison responded. I daresay it took the Yard some time to get Jamison out here—what did you do in the meantime?"

Brighton hesitated; his face began to colour slightly. "Well, Mr. Pons, it was a funny thing. The sight of Gerald dead there on the floor simply bowled me over. I was so nervous—I am very nervous, you will have noticed—and I was very much upset. After I called the Yard, I tried to collect my thoughts, and out of everything, one thought stood out."

"And that?"

"Two days ago Gerald had expressed a wish that three dwarf figures which he had procured in Germany should be coloured for him—he wanted them a cardinal red; now, this thought came to me again and again, and what I ended up in doing was to paint those figures. They're out in the kitchen now. I painted them—I was just finishing when Mr. Jamison came, as he can tell you."

"And these figures," said Pons, "where were they standing?"

Brighton indicated a mantel above a fireplace across from the open French doors. "They were on that mantel."

Pons nodded. "I understand that apart from his work as an author, Mr. Lane was accomplished also as an artist of no small repute. Might I ask why he did not himself paint the figures?"

Brighton contemplated the covered body on the floor. "Gerald was a very busy man, Mr. Pons. Nor was such work quite within his scope. Landscapes, seascapes—yes, those Gerald could do, but to coat these figures and still retain the original delicacy of their

construction and execution, this Gerald knew himself incapable of doing. But I've done such things before; you'll see them in all the rooms."

"Indeed," murmured Pons.

Brighton fixed his large eyes on Solar Pons and regarded him unblinkingly. Pons stepped to one side and walked a short distance to a door leading into an inner room; through this he peered momentarily. From the door he turned and said, "I understand that you've been occupying this house for six months you furnished it, I take it?"

"Yes," answered the author. "I furnished my room and the dining-room; Gerald furnished his room and the drawing-room; we went together on the kitchen and the smaller room."

"Ah, so?" murmured Pons, obviously interested. "I should like to see Mr. Lane's room."

"Very well," assented Brighton. "Please follow me." He turned, passing Pons, and entered the inner rooms through the door at which Pons was standing.

Pons followed.

Alone, Inspector Jamison and I turned at once to each other. "It doesn't seem we're getting very much ahead," said Jamison.

"Lane's left-handedness ought to mean something since Pons mentioned it," I suggested.

"It indicates for one thing that there was certainly a struggle," said Jamison, and would perhaps have said more, had not Pons popped into the room at that moment.

"Have you looked into the adjoining dining-room, Jamison?" asked Pons.

"Haven't moved," said Jamison.

"So? Well, take a look at it."

Pons stepped aside and Jamison moved briskly forward. Brighton appeared in the doorway and watched the proceedings with a puzzled face. In a moment Jamison was back.

"Well, Jamison?" asked Pons.

"Funny room, Mr. Pons. Highly decorative, I'd say."

"Quite so," said Pons. His eyes were eager, and he now moved forward again and took his stand at the French doors, looking out across the terrace to a yard adjoining the garden, separated only by a hedge, where a child was playing at building a sand or mud castle.

"Is there anything you could suggest?" asked Jamison in a troubled voice.

Pons turned slightly. "I would call your attention to the peculiarity of this room."

Jamison looked bewildered; he cast a rapid glance around him. "But there's nothing peculiar about this room," he protested.

"That is the peculiarity!" returned Pons.

At the same moment Pons stepped from the room and ran lightly across the terrace. He vaulted the hedge and entered the adjoining yard, where he squatted beside the child and his mud-castle.

"Dear me," murmured Brighton. "What a strange temperament Mr. Pons has. Rather . . . rather. . . ." He broke off and looked helplessly at Jamison, who was standing and staring at Pons in sheer amazement. "Do you think he's quite quite right?" suggested Brighton hesitatingly, blinking owlishly through his glasses. "His actions, now. . . ."

Indeed, Brighton was in a measure justified, for Pons was obviously assisting the child to build his mud-castle. I stepped closer to the French doors, the better to observe the two. Pons was evidently absorbed, but I could see that he was talking to the child at the same time. The child, however, appeared older than I had guessed at first sight—a boy, about four years of age.

For fully ten minutes Pons stayed with the child. When he came back, it was only when he stepped into the room that the tension broke.

"Well, Mr. Pons, whatever this room lacks in peculiarity you you certainly make up for," said Brighton uneasily.

"Indeed, Mr. Brighton," said Pons, smiling. "My peculiarity however, has just enabled me to discover the source of the curious sloshing sound you heard this morning."

"You don't mean the child?" put in Jamison.

"Precisely. The sloshing sound rose from the child's patting the sand on to the castle, which you will see is already quite far advanced, showing that it has been in the process of erection for some hours. The sound of running water came from a hose, which he can turn on or off at the nozzle whenever he wishes. It follows, then, that the child was building his castle at the time of Mr. Lane's death."

Jamison and Brighton turned quickly to Pons.

"You questioned the child?" asked Jamison.

Pons nodded. "He heard the struggle of which we already have evidence; hence it follows that the struggle was muffled, since the child, directly across from the open French doors heard it, and Mr

Brighton, in the rear, did not."

Pons turned to Brighton. "There has been some mention of a note—a threatening note received by Mr. Lane shortly before his death."

Brighton nodded. "Yes, but it has been destroyed. It was directed to Gerald by some journalist. Mr. John Estenham, I think, for Gerald had lately written a sharp burlesque of Estenham."

"Mr. Estenham was killed three days ago coming back from the Sussex races," said Pons. "Were you aware of this?"

Brighton nodded easily. "Yes, I knew that."

Jamison bristled. "Why didn't you tell us that this morning? When we questioned you?"

Brighton looked surprised. "Why, I thought you knew, of course. If you read the papers—of course, everyone reads the papers."

Jamison subsided. Pons repressed a smile.

"Had Mr. Lane no other enemies?" asked Pons.

"I wouldn't say Estenham was an enemy, Mr. Pons. It's a case of professional rivalry. If he did send that threat, I don't think he sent it seriously. No, I don't think Gerald had any enemies."

"Very good. I should like to have a look at the burlesque that Mr. Lane wrote; I daresay there's a copy of it about."

"Yes, there's a copy in my room," said Brighton. "I'll get it for you."

Hardly had the author disappeared into the dining-room before Pons was up and out through the terrace like a shot. He vanished around a corner before either Jamison or I could move.

A few minutes elapsed.

Brighton returned and looked absently around the room. "Where is Mr. Pons?" he asked.

Even as he spoke Pons stepped into the room from the terrace. He was wiping his hands on a large handkerchief, which he proceeded to stuff into his topcoat pocket. I saw that both his pockets were heavily weighted down: from one a corner of newspaper projected.

"Ah, Mr. Brighton," he said, "you have the article."

Brighton extended the folded clipping to Pons without a word. He fixed his large, unblinking eyes on Pons, and continued to regard him as he read here and there from the article.

"'The great Mr. Pain,'" began Pons, "'has again caused somewhat of a furore by a report on the races, with which he is entirely too familiar. We are told that Mr. Pain has profited by the

paces; indeed, Mr. Pain is now engaged in financing a new theatrical project, in which he will take the leading role, while directing the show and incidentally also financing it. . . . Mr. Pain is a great asset to certain of us; no doubt of it.' Hm! Hm!" muttered Pons, and read the remainder of the article in silence. Looking up at last, he said, "I notice that this article isn't signed."

"That's quite usual, Mr. Pons. Very often we do not sign our articles. Often, too, its position in the paper will determine the writer. I think that is how Estenham recognized the author of this satire."

"Indeed," murmured Pons. "I understand that Mr. Lane himself had quite an interest in the theatre?"

Brighton nodded. "Gerald had been an actor since he could walk. His mother was the actress, Jenny Lane. You remember her."

"Quite so. And did Mr. Lane also report races occasionally? This article shows quite a knowledge of racing."

"Gerald used to report races in his earlier days. I think that he still followed them quite eagerly, and often placed money."

"Thank you, Mr. Brighton. One more thing. I understand that the stiletto which killed your colleague was his own property. Exactly where was this weapon before it was taken up today?"

"Just over on that small stand there," said Brighton, indicating the stand in question. "It stood just at one side of the entrance to the room from the hall."

Pons moved rapidly to the stand and examined it. Jamison followed him with his eyes.

"The murderer picked it up as he entered and came directly at Lane," suggested Jamison.

Pons nodded abstractedly, but made no reply. I could see from the puzzled expression on his face that he was in deep thought. Finally he left off his examination and looked over at Brighton.

"I think that will be all. We can do no more here," he said, turning to Jamison. "You might call at our lodgings in about an hour, Jamison. I may have something for you. In the meantime, you may have the body moved."

In our rooms once more, Pons proceeded to empty his topcoat pockets of the heavy objects wrapped in newspaper. I stared at Pons in curiosity, but I forebore to question him, preferring to wait until he spoke of his find. But I was to be disappointed, for, after slipping into his dressing gown, Pons gathered up his burden and disappeared into his laboratory, where I soon heard the sound of

running water, punctuated at intervals by muttered ejaculations from Pons.

It was three-quarters of an hour before he finally emerged, and by that time my curiosity knew no bounds.

"Well," I asked, "what have you been doing?"

"Putting our little problem together in its proper order, Parker."

I saw now that he held in his hand a curiously carved manikin, a troll figure, Austrian in origin.

"The other two are in the laboratory," said Pons. "This is the only one we're concerned with."

"Lane's three dwarfs, are they?"

He nodded silently. He placed the dwarf upon the table and regarded it fondly.

"I thought they were red," I put in.

"So they were," said Pons. "I have just now removed the paint."

"Why?"

"To ascertain which of the three made the bruises on Lane's body, and to prove to myself that the figures were painted not because Lane wished it so, but because one of them was stained with blood."

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed.

"This wood, as you see," Pons went on imperturbably, "takes stain very easily. Even now I have not been able to get all the paint off; yet, it's easy to see under scrutiny where the original bloodstain was. I have no doubt that Brighton carefully washed off what blood he could, but he could not wholly remove the stain. Therefore, rather than destroy these attractive figures, he thought to cover them with paint so as to hide the bloodstain."

"Then Brighton is the murderer!"

Pons chuckled. "Brighton hasn't the courage to kill anything yet he has the cleverness to try to foil the police investigation by cloaking what little evidence there is."

"He knows who killed Lane, then?"

"He knows all about the matter, Parker," replied Pons. "Let me assure you that it's not as mysterious as you have perhaps imagined."

At this moment there was a ring at the doorbell, and shortly after, Jamison strode into the room, excitement showing in his face.

"There's been a new development, Pons," he said eagerly.

"Indeed?"

"You remember those red dwarfs Brighton mentioned?"

Pons nodded.

"Well, they're gone. Someone's made off with them. Brighton is quite upset about the affair."

"I'm sorry to hear that," replied Pons. "Because I took them myself."

"You!" exclaimed Jamison.

"Yes. Here's one of them," continued Pons, handing to Jamison the dwarf he had been discussing.

"But this isn't red," protested Jamison.

"No, certainly not. I cleaned them in order to get to the bottom of this matter."

"You have the murderer!" exclaimed Jamison.

"There is no murderer," said Pons.

"Ah, it was suicide after all! I was right at first, then?"

"It was not suicide," continued Pons with maddening imperturbability.

"Well," said Jamison in justifiable exasperation, "I'm certain he didn't die of heart failure."

"But almost the same, Jamison," chuckled Pons. "The entire matter was somewhat of an accident." Pons reached down into his wastepaper-basket and drew forth a newspaper, through which he searched diligently before finding what he sought. At last, however, he folded the paper and extended it to Jamison, indicating a paragraph to him. "Read it aloud," Pons suggested. "I'm afraid I had a slight lead on you at the outset."

"The artist and author, Mr. Gerald Lane, was today fined twenty guineas for assault and battery committed on the person of Mr. Eldridge Mordon, the art critic, whose comments on his work aroused the temper of Mr. Lane. Mr. Lane, it will be remembered, was recently severely reprimanded in this court for a like offence, he is well known in artistic circles for his furious outbursts of temper."

"You see it now, I hope," said Pons.

Jamison shook his head. "It doesn't help me in the least," he said. "But surely this fact alone did not lead you to the solution of the case?"

"No, certainly not," said Pons. "But reflect, I called your attention to my other point, in noting the peculiarity of the room in which we found the body. If you care now to re-examine the house in St John's Wood, you'll see that every room furnished by Brighton is marked by a radical clash of colours—no true artist can tolerate such gaudy, showy decorative effects as those coloured

figures in the other rooms. Lane's rooms are in splendid harmony. Yet we were told that he had wished to have his German troll figures painted a cardinal red—a colour altogether out of harmony with his room. That, Jamison, was one of my chief points. There was nothing peculiar about the room, but, after you look into the dining-room, that very fact becomes a peculiarity."

"Then Brighton deliberately blocked our investigation," put in Jamison.

"I fear he did," agreed Pons. "But his work was clumsily done; any amateur could see through it."

"Yet I did not."

"Well, it's really quite elementary," said Pons. "At the outset, it should be perfectly obvious that the author of that article in the paper was not Lane at all, but Brighton, and that the subject had nothing at all to do with the man Estenham, but concerned Lane. Note the curious point of the name of the subject, *Pain*—what more similar in mockery to Lane? Then too, throughout the entire article the parallelism of character between Pain and Lane is too obvious. There was no note from Estenham, of course, but Brighton rather cleverly invented this point to befog the police."

Jamison looked uncomfortable.

"Couple this fact with what we knew at the outset. It was certainly inconceivable that Lane should want to break the harmony of his room by introducing the red figures; this struck me at once. Then I thought of the reputed violence of Lane's temper, and when I read the article itself, my suspicions were definitely formulated and I lacked only the proof, which I already had in my pocket. Now that I've cleaned the figures, I have ascertained that on one of them there is still evidence of a bloodstain."

"Then it was this that made the bruises on Lane's body," Jamison cut in.

Pons nodded.

"But if the entire matter was an accident, why should Brighton strike him like that—assuming it was Brighton who inflicted the bruises?"

"It was," Pons assented. "That, however, is equally elementary. You have only to recall Lane's violent temper and imagine what a rage he flew into when he discovered that the author of the satiric article was Brighton. He found this out and rushed home immediately to take issue with Brighton. He was in a violent temper, naturally. Brighton was probably not in the garden at all, but was somewhere in the house. By the time that Lane had his outer

clothing off, Brighton had heard him, and he came into the room where we found the body, wondering what had brought Lane home. Thus it was that the child next door heard the struggle that followed and Brighton did not, because Brighton was there, in the room.

"At the moment that Brighton entered the room, Lane undoubtedly caught up the first weapon that came to hand—his stiletto. Brighton instinctively moved to protect himself, and took up the only weapon within his reach, one of the little manikins on the mantel behind him. He had no wish to injure Lane, knowing that the violence of his temper passed quickly, but he did not want to be slashed if he could help it. Therefore, he struck at Lane's left hand—Lane was left-handed—hoping to disarm him. When this was not effective, most probably Brighton seized hold of Lane's left hand, dropping the manikin, and struggled with him—the result was the first wound inflicted on Lane.

"Undoubtedly, in the course of the struggle, Lane pressed Brighton pretty hard, and Brighton clung all the while to Lane's left hand, so that in the end, when Brighton was forced to the wall, it was pure accident that the stiletto impaled Lane. You probably noticed in your examination of the body that the left arm was twisted toward the stiletto; I daresay that's as good a point as any—it strikes me as more or less throwing the weight of evidence on the fact that Lane's hand was clasped about the weapon when it entered his heart. And then it is needless for me to say, I suppose, Lane must have fallen near the dwarf that Brighton had dropped, so that it became bloodstained.

"Of course, it's clear that, after his first fright, Brighton became calculatingly cool; the man who wrote the monograph on chess emerged then, and laid elaborate plans to foil an investigation. And in this he might well have succeeded, had his artistic leanings not bidden him keep the figures, the one of which was so bloodstained that he could not wash it all away, by painting them.

"His motivation in hiding the facts was, naturally enough, the fear that the facts might be misconstrued."

Pons paused and lit his pipe.

"You might take the manikins back to him, Jamison," he added. "And pray don't think of prosecuting Brighton, for a capable barrister will efficiently clear him of all blame in the matter, especially since there is Lane's previous record to bring forward."

The Adventure of the Broken Chessman

IN JUNE of the same year in which Solar Pons examined into the singular affair of the Black Narcissus, he was sitting one evening, engaged in the compilation of his voluminous scrapbook of British crimes and criminological data, and talking desultorily of the events which passed under his eye.

"The majority of crimes are remarkably unimaginative," he said. "A body found in a little-traveled lane—a corpse in a boudoir—murder during robbery. Here, for instance," he read, "'Lodger Found Dead. Mrs. Ottilia Baker, 37 Woburn Place, this morning discovered the body of a lodger dead in his room. The unfortunate man's head had been battered in, and his room had been ransacked. Mrs. Baker identified her lodger as Landon Hall. Relatives are asked to communicate with Scotland Yard.' Surely nothing could be more prosaic?" He paused thoughtfully, his hand going to the lobe of his left ear. "And yet," he went on, "'Landon Hall' is almost certainly an assumed name. One can infer as much not only by its sound but also by the patent indication that his landlady knows so little about him and his origins that 'relatives are asked to communicate with Scotland Yard.'"

"I suppose there are thousands of people who drop out of sight only to assume new identities and begin life over in some other place," I ventured.

"Elementary," murmured Pons. "It is their motives which are of primary interest."

He put the cutting away and went on to others. From time to time he read sentences from the dispatches, making brief comments on them. Ostensibly, the matter of Mrs. Ottilia Baker's murdered lodger had been forgotten. Yet it was destined to be brought again to our attention, and that before the evening was done.

It was at eight o'clock that the door bell jangled. Pons was at the moment near the window; he drew aside the curtain and looked down into Praed Street.

"Ah, we are about to have a visitor of some importance," he observed. "It may well be an invitation to another of those little adventures which you are so fond of chronicling, Parker."

He returned from the window in time to greet the tall, cloaked individual Mrs. Johnson admitted to our quarters. He came into the room somewhat diffidently, inclined his head slightly, and looked toward Pons.

"Mr. Solar Pons?"

"I am at your service," answered Pons, and placed a chair for our visitor, whose voice, I could not help noticing, had a distinctly foreign accent.

Of our visitor's face, I could see very little, for his long black cloak successfully covered his chin, and his eyes were hidden by smoked glasses, attached to what appeared to be an expensive black cord which, followed downward, disappeared into the folds of his cloak at the neck. His hands were gloved, and he carried a walking-stick, which was of ebony with an ivory handle. His lips were thin and firm, his nose was sharply aquiline. His hair was jet black, and the bushy eyebrows projecting above the rims of his glasses were black, too.

"It will be necessary that my identity remain a secret, Mr. Pons; it would not be politic for my connection with the matter in question to become known."

Pons seated himself to face our visitor and inquired, without a flicker of mischief, "What is the matter in question, M. Parenin?"

Our visitor started slightly, but betrayed himself by no other sign. "Ah, you know me."

"I submit that as long as the pennant on your motor remains unaltered, any attempt at personal concealment is foredoomed to failure. The pennant suggests the Russian Consul," replied Pons. "But I daresay the matter you have come to see me about is not connected with your official status or with the official business of the government you represent."

"Not directly, Mr. Pons. That is to say not as yet. I may at any moment receive orders from Leningrad to proceed in the matter, but thus far I am acting solely on my own initiative."

"Pray let us consider the problem, M. Parenin."

"You may have read of a Mrs. Ottilia Baker's discovering a murdered lodger at her establishment at 37 Woburn Place this morning," began Parenin crisply.

"I remember doing so. A gentleman named Landon Hall; obviously, I thought, an assumed name."

"It was not Landon Hall who was found dead, however," continued Parenin. "A description subsequently published in the

national press was called to my attention by my secretary. I recognized the victim at once as one of Russia's secret agents—a certain man, notoriously known for his shrewdness and bestiality, as well as the disturbing degree of his success in the zealous prosecution of his assignments. You will be familiar with his name, Mr. Pons—it is Pyotor Propov."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Pons. "At one time of the terrible Inner Circle; the same man who shot the aged Prince Casimir in 1918, who assassinated the children of Madame Kolosov, who decapitated the Grand Duchess Yolande—among other outrages."

"Your information is correct, Mr. Pons. It was he whose body Mrs. Baker discovered in Landon Hall's room this morning. My secretary has viewed the body; there is no question about his identity."

"I have little inclination to apprehend his murderer," said Pons dryly.

Our visitor smiled. "It was not my intention to ask you to do so. It is because I desire the opposite end that I have wished my identity kept secret. Mr. Pons, I would wish you to do all in your power to so confuse the official police that they will not suspect the identity of the actual murderer!"

Pons looked his surprise and delight. "Dear me, M. Parenin! What an extraordinary request!"

"I confide in you that I never had any love for Propov or his methods; I am not alone in my convictions," our visitor assured Pons. "Believe me, sir, I could mention many names closely associated with our government."

Pons rested his chin briefly on his clasped hands. "I can understand your abhorrence of Propov's methods," he said presently. "But, in view of the unusual nature of your request, I am sure you will allow me some time to consider it, M. Parenin. I do not think that I could with conceivable justice hinder the investigation. I should be forced on my honour to give the police such assistance as I can, though manifestly I need not do so in so direct a fashion that they have only to act to complete the matter. We shall have to learn who is in charge from the Yard."

"An Inspector Jamison," replied our visitor at once.

"Ah, our old friend, Jamison." Pons smiled. "I am curious to know what he makes of the problem. I fear, though, that the official police will have had ample time to muddle up the scene."

"On the contrary," interposed the Russian Consul. "I have used

the influence of the Consulate to have everything kept as it was found until you arrived on the scene."

"Capital!" exclaimed Pons. "We will run over without delay."

Our drive to Number 37 Woburn Place was painstakingly slow, for the Consul's chauffeur found it necessary to drive with caution in the thick yellow fog which had settled over London. Traffic was halted for some time at Charing Cross Road junction by extremely heavy traffic pouring down Tottenham Court Road from North London. Moreover, travel along New Oxford Street and Holborn was little better. Yet, in a relatively short time, we came to a stop before a three-storey building which loomed up darkly in the fog.

Pons and I left the car without the Consul.

M. Parenin leaned from the machine. "It would not do for me to be seen here, Mr. Pons, but I shall be found at any time at the Consulate. I shall be happy to call on you if you wish and to do whatever I can to assist your inquiry."

A constable called out from the entrance to the lodging-house; at this, M. Parenin gave a curt order to his chauffeur; the car started up and was quickly swallowed by the close-pressing fog. The constable came partway down to the street, barring the way.

"No admittance," he announced flatly. But at this moment the light from his torch found Pons's face. "Oh, it's Mr. Pons. And Dr. Parker. Excuse me, sir. Just follow me, Mr. Pons. Inspector Jamison's inside."

The torch went out and the constable moved away from us to throw open the outer door. At the sound of our entrance another constable looked from a room at the far end of a long hall, his head framed in the light streaming through the open doorway. He withdrew, and gave place to Inspector Jamison, whose rotund form was readily recognizable as he stepped out into the hall to confront us.

"My word, Pons!" he exclaimed. "I never thought to encounter you at the scene of so ordinary a crime."

"However intentioned, you flatter me," said Pons with a thin smile. "Yet it hardly strikes me that the discovery of an unknown victim of murder in a room let to someone else is entirely commonplace."

Jamison shrugged and stepped aside, his chubby face with its carefully kept moustache turned now toward the contents of the room. "Take a look around, Pons. We'd like to have the body moved, the Foreign Office ordered us to disturb nothing until you had seen the place."

The first object to attract Pons's attention was, of course, the corpse of the victim, almost in the centre of the room, the body slumped upon a small table from a large armchair. The head and shoulders had fallen forward to a chessboard on the table and lay grotesquely amid a scattered group of overturned chessmen. In falling forward, the victim's arm must have swept half the table clear, for chessmen were flung over the floor to the left. The right arm supported the victim's head, and in his right hand a chessman was still tightly clenched. Quite evidently the murdered man had been struck down from behind; next to the chair on the floor lay the heavy candelabrum already designated by Scotland Yard as the instrument of death.

The victim, I saw after but a little examination, was not too well dressed; yet there were some indications that his dress was casual rather by deliberation than of necessity. He was extremely obese, and his large, flabby hands with the puffy face beneath the bushy black beard which covered the lower half of it, testified to indulgent living. He was far from an attractive man; he would easily have repelled many people in life.

Pons, however, paid scant attention to the body. He seemed more concerned with traces of the former occupant of the room than with the victim's appearance. The room itself was indeed in a state of disorder, as the accounts in the press stated: it gave every evidence of having been hastily gone through in a determined search. Drawers stood half-open, clothes lay on the floor of the open closet at the far end of the room, books and papers were tumbled indiscriminately from the shelves and stands along the walls.

"Has anything been taken from Propov's pockets?" asked Pons.

Jamison nodded and pointed silently to a chair opposite the victim. There lay two objects: an ordinary sandbag and a peculiar metal seal. Pons examined one after the other with his customary care.

"The sandbag is Propov's trademark," said Jamison. "The seal seems to be that of some secret organization."

"The Inner Circle," suggested Pons with an oblique smile.

"I wondered about that," assented Jamison, "but I'm not sure the organization's still in existence. The Yard's had no definite word of the Circle's work of late; neither has British Intelligence. We can assume that the Circle has either been suppressed or that it's gone underground."

"The design in the seal is crudely stamped in and suggests the Soviet government," said Pons, handing the seal to Jamison. "The

Inner Circle has probably been absorbed into the OGPU."

Pons now walked attentively about the room, examining drawers and books on the shelves, pausing before one shelf of books for some time. He invaded the clothes-closet and the adjoining lavatory. He returned at last and stood with Jamison gazing at the body.

"Undoubtedly the Yard has evolved a theory," said Pons.

"Nothing definite, no," answered Jamison. "It's my idea this man Propov came here to do away with Mrs. Baker's lodger, but something went wrong and the tables were turned. I don't entirely eliminate the possibility of a third person's concern, of course."

"You have a description of the man who called himself Landon Hall?"

"As far as it goes, yes. Mrs. Baker's statement isn't particularly helpful. A man of medium height, with a small pointed beard."

"Yet someone shaved in the bathroom not less than twenty-four hours ago," interposed Pons.

"He might have shaved himself," agreed Jamison. "That would be the logical thing to do if he killed Propov and hoped to escape."

"Clean-shaven, then. A man who walked with a limp, and probably had a left leg of cork—you too certainly noticed the smooth left boots of each pair in the closet."

Jamison nodded casually.

"A man of some wealth," Pons went on, "for only a wealthy man would afford a single private printing of a Russian translation of Brillat-Savarin's *Physiology of Taste*, with an inlaid original plate by Augustus John. A highly cultured man; he has books in seven different languages. And I daresay a pronounced aesthete, for he owns such books as Huysman's *A Rebours* and *La Bas*, Machen's *Hill of Dreams*, Pater's *Marius*, Ruskin's *Stones of Venice*, and others expounding aesthetic doctrines. Finally, he was either of the Russian nobility or in a position to receive their books, for many of his volumes are marked with the Romanoff coat of arms."

Jamison looked at Pons a little askance.

"Of course, you noticed that the man wore his hair rather long, and that he was of middle age or past, as the long grey and black hairs on the greatcoat in the closet tell us. And you will doubtless have seen that Hall was of a highly nervous temperament, and that he wore a monocle?"

"You have the better of me, Pons," said Jamison with admirable patience. "One would think you know the man."



"I fancy I do," said Pons quietly.

Jamison looked the amazement he felt. "Oh, come now, Pons! You don't expect me to believe that?"

Pons smiled enigmatically.

"But if you do, of course, your inferences about his appearance are elementary," continued Jamison. "His nervous temperament, for instance."

"In the second drawer of that bureau beyond the table you'll find an eyeglass on a cord; the cord is badly frayed along a section covered by the movement of the clip on it," answered Pons. "I submit that nervous people who wear glasses consistently play with the clips on their cords, twirl them, and otherwise occupy their hands. But these matters are, as you say, elementary. You were beginning to tell me your concept of what took place here, assuming that Propov came here to do away with Hall."

"Yes." Jamison would have gone on, but Pons once again interrupted him.

"And then softened sufficiently to sit down for a game of chess with him?"

Jamison was momentarily disconcerted. "Perhaps. The tenant Hall may not have known Propov."

"I rather think he did. As a matter of fact, an old picture of Propov, cut from a newspaper, lies between the pages of one of the books on the top shelf of the rack across from the table. A book with a bright red binding," Pons went on, as Constable Jones went over to examine the books on the top shelf.

The picture was shortly laid down before Jamison, who examined it thoughtfully, his pale eyes narrowed.

"That's at least five years old, Pons," he said at last. "Hall might easily have forgotten him since then."

"I do not remember saying anything to the contrary," agreed Pons. "But the picture you adduce of a man bent on murder coming calmly to a chess game and himself being murdered leaves some unsatisfactory questions. I submit that murder was not Comrade Propov's primary goal. I suggest that he was in search of something."

Jamison made an all-embracing gesture toward the ransacked appearance of the room.

"Ah, but this *mêlée* was not made by someone in search of something," protested Pons. "Surely Hall would not have permitted Propov to ransack his room? And surely, had he done so, Propov

would not be sitting at chess. No, the appearance of the room derives from the haste of the murderer to take his leave with such valuables as he could not do without."

"Unless, of course, we postulate a third and thus far unknown murderer."

"Granted. You have looked up Propov?"

"Yes. He was registered at 217 St. George Street as Povor Harlov. The area is one frequented by Russian emigrés."

"Very probably then Hall knew Propov initially as Harlov."

"We have assumed that Hall recognized Propov only as a fellow Russian," said Jamison. "This meeting was very likely not their first. Hall, if a Russian, was himself in hiding, and took Propov for another Russian in hiding. What happened, as I see it, was this: in the middle of a game of chess, Hall believes that his life is in danger from the man he knows as Harlov. He rises on some pretext and, passing behind Propov, seizes the candelabrum and strikes Propov down. He then shaves hurriedly, takes only the barest necessities, and escapes."

"Yet he left his wallet, well stuffed with notes, in the pocket of his greatcoat."

"He may easily have forgotten it," explained Jamison.

"Despite taking the trouble to shave in order to disguise himself? Does it not seem logical that, having gone so far, he should also supply himself with money to take him from London?"

"He may have had other resources."

"Conceivably. You postulate that Propov and Hall were acquainted as countrymen; Propov's London address would be a natural place for Hall to make Propov's acquaintance, assuming both men to be in hiding. Yet, does it not seem somewhat unusual that Hall, a highly cultured man, would frequent a place which is not particularly noted for harbouring men of culture, but rather more men of Propov's calibre?"

"Why not?" protested Jamison. "The fellow was in hiding, wasn't he? He was a Russian; it seems natural that he'd seek out other Russians even at the risk of running foul of the Yard."

Pons raised his eyebrows. "You believe he was in hiding from the police? I submit rather that he was hiding from his fellow countrymen."

"Then how explain his willingness to see Propov?" countered Jamison triumphantly.

"We have no evidence that he was willing to see Propov," retorted Pons. "Rather Harlov."

"Very well," snapped Jamison, disgruntled. "Go on."

"We might as conceivably suspect Hall and Propov of being two Soviet government agents in a quarrel which turned out disastrously for Propov. In such an event, the charge would very likely be murder in the first degree. But if your hypothesis proves correct, would the charge not then be countered by a claim of self-defence?"

Jamison pursed his lips thoughtfully. "I doubt it," he said finally. "He might plead self-defence; wouldn't that be natural? Circumstantial evidence wouldn't prove his claim. Chances are, though, he'd be packed off to Russia, unless he's taken out papers."

"And left to the mercy of the Soviet government, eh?" asked Pons.

"I suppose so."

I had had no difficulty in following this seemingly aimless conversation; clearly Pons meant to establish in his own mind the possible fate of the man Hall, if Scotland Yard found him. Pons, however, having satisfied himself on this score, was now engaged in looking at the chessmen scattered about; he appeared to be counting them, and I, too, began almost unconsciously to add them up—sixteen pawns, four rooks, four knights, four bishops, two queens—but there was only one king. Perhaps the remaining king had been kicked under one of the articles of furniture.

Even as the thought occurred to me, Pons went to the floor on his knees and began to peer rapidly under the table and around the rug at the edge of the chairs. Jamison watched in silence; his association with Pons had been of sufficient duration to teach him a certain tacit respect for my companion's methods. He contented himself only with a routine examination of a chessman, a knight he picked up from the table.

The chessmen were carved in ivory and seemed very solid. The set was doubtless valuable; I should have regretted parting with it, had I owned it, for it appeared to be hand-wrought. But the set was evidently not without blemish, for when Pons came to his feet once more, he held in his hands two queens, one of which he immediately placed upright on the table, the other of which he continued to hold; its perfect whiteness was marred by a faint dull brown line which encircled it in the middle. It had obviously at one time been broken and mended with glue.

"I take it you noticed that one of the chessmen, a king, is missing?"

"I hadn't," confessed Jamison. "I daresay they played with a substitute."

"That is always a possibility, however remote," agreed Pons. He held the queen out to Jamison, who took it. "You have no objection to my keeping this?"

"None at all, provided only you'll have to surrender it if Hall turns up and demands it."

"Quite so," said Pons, dropping the chessman into his pocket.

"I need hardly ask," asked Jamison somewhat stuffily, "whether you and I are working toward the same end. I'm satisfied that anyone with power enough to hold us up for ten hours must be someone of considerable influence; so I'm satisfied on that score."

"Capital!" exclaimed Pons. "Yet there are a few favours I'd like to ask for your own sake as well as mine. I want you to use the Yard's influence to insert a news paragraph in all the national dailies. Let the Yard phrase it as they see fit. It should be to the effect that —" He paused abruptly, halted by the dubiety of Jamison's expression. "But, no, let me set it down."

He drew a chair up to the table, moved the chessmen to one side, and found paper in a drawer opposite Propov's body. Since he carried his pen with him, he was soon writing rapidly in a firm, legible hand, with Inspector Jamison and myself reading over his shoulders as he wrote, much to Pons's annoyance.

"The mysterious murder of an unknown person in the lodging house of Mrs. Ottilia Baker, 37 Woburn Place, was taken in hand today by Inspector Seymour R. Jamison, whose capable work in the matter of the Black Narcissus crime only two weeks ago will be recalled. Inspector Jamison quickly discovered that the deceased was Pyotor Harlov, a Russian emigré, registered at 217 St. George Street, Stepney. Spurred by the nature of the facts evident to him, the Inspector has now reached the conclusion that the lodger, Landon Hall, has also met with foul play, since many of his most valuable possessions are still in his lodgings. Mr. Hall may have been abducted, and various addresses in Stepney and Wapping, known to be frequented by Russian emigrés, are under surveillance.

"The body of Harlov has been removed, and the guard has been lifted. Mrs. Baker has requested to relatives of Mr. Hall

to step forward and remove his effects, so that she may re-let the room. That the criminal or criminals will not long remain at large is assured by Inspector Jamison's previous performances."

Pons finished; he turned to hand the account to Jamison. "Read it over and send it off at once."

"Very well, Pons," said Jamison, manifestly flattered at the highly complimentary nature of what my companion had written. He did not trouble to re-read the notice, but beckoned to Constable Jones, gave him what Pons had written, and turned back to Pons. "Do you suggest we watch 217 St. George Street for the abductors?"

"By all means, Jamison," replied Pons. "And, of course, you will withdraw your men from here at once."

Jamison demurred. "Do you think that the best course?"

"In view of the fact that Parker and I will occupy this room until at least the day after tomorrow, I think it is. If any results are to be expected, the plan is best. And pray observe that such results as I may obtain are yours as well. By all means take all the time you need to remove Propov's body and the evidence collected on that chair, with the addition of the candelabrum, the *instrumentum mortis*."

It was not until after Inspector Jamison and his men had departed that Pons relaxed. He sat down in the chair which had so recently held the evidence Jamison had collected and regarded the empty chair across from him with quizzical interest. From there his gaze went to the mantel behind, and I assumed that he was picturing Hall in the act of striking down Propov.

"Yes, you are right, Parker," Pons said without turning. "I am reconstructing the crime. There are aspects of it which I find nothing short of intriguing."

"Oh, come, Pons!" I protested. "It seems as plain as a pikestaff to me."

"I don't doubt it," he replied dryly. "But think on it for a moment. We are allowed to assume that Propov, the OGPU killer, is on Hall's trail. With what end but that to which so many other White Russians have come—assassination? Yet we have all the evidence to believe that the two men, murderer and victim, were engaged in a game of chess before the crime. I submit that if Propov's motive and goal were Hall's death, no good could have come

of having a game of chess with his intended victim. The portrait of the gloating killer is, I fear, limited very largely to the penny dreadfuls. No, I fancy, M. Propov's goal was not primarily Hall's death, whatever his secondary goal may have been. This seems to have escaped the good Jamison; I am curious to know whether it escaped M. Parenin as well."

"The circumstances are somewhat peculiar," I admitted

"It is generous of you to say so," said Pons with a whimsical smile.

"But not half so peculiar as your statement that you knew who Hall really was."

"Ah, it is not particularly difficult to establish Hall's identity. We have been given several leading facts—he is a Russian emigré, he has some royal connections, he lacks one leg or foot, he wore a black Vandyke. Think back to 1917. Picture to yourself a Russian nobleman who fits Hall's description."

The picture was immediately provocative; it called to mind an old portrait-photograph I had seen in a London exhibition. The portrait, I remembered, had been labeled with the name of a gallant Russian count, and newspapers had made especial mention of his having had a leg shot off in a Polish border skirmish in 1914.

"Why," I began, "it would suggest—but no, he is dead."

"You were thinking of?" asked Pons.

"Count Sergei Romanoff, cousin to the Czar."

"Precisely. That is our man."

"Impossible!" I cried.

"Not at all! No one has ever proved his death. Can you recall the circumstances relating to his disappearance?"

"I know of none. I am certain he has never again appeared, though many court nobles of Russia have turned up in Vienna and Paris."

"Allow me to refresh your memory. Rumour prevalent in 1918 announced his 'escape disappearance,' it was then called, a week before the Czar and his family were seized. Through Berlin, Scotland Yard received certain information with which Inspector Jamison might have done well to acquaint himself. The Count did not vanish entirely empty handed; with him went a rather precious stone, the Orloff diamond, worth about a hundred thousand pounds."

"Ah! Propov's goal!"

"You have hit it, Parker. I congratulate you," said Pons. "I find it difficult to conceive that the Soviets would permit such a jewel to slip through their hands without at least an attempt to retrieve it. The assignment is surely a natural one for a man like Propov. Yet the Count must have known the identity of his pursuer, whose search began in 1923, for the cutting he saved so suggests; it is dated 1923, which is additionally informative. The portrait in the cutting might account for the Count's failure to recognize Propov when he first saw him, for the black beard was not characteristic of Propov, who was one of those fellows who fancy themselves to best advantage with a strong lower jaw jutting out like a challenge to their fellow men.

"Let us, then, reconstruct events as they very probably took place. We can assume that the Count met Propov, perhaps in one of those 'accidental' meetings which Propov could arrange. Propov is in no haste to liquidate the Count; he must first learn where the stone is hidden. So he cultivates the Count, and he is finally invited to the Count's lodgings, where he waits for some betrayal of the jewel's hiding-place. Unfortunately for him, the Count recognizes Propov in the man Harlov, and acts at once, as Jamison concluded, by taking the offensive – rising on some pretext, passing behind his would-be assassin, to seize the heavy bronze candelabrum with which to kill Propov. His next moves are obviously the result of panic. Was Propov alone? Is the house under observation even now? He tries to disguise an identity already marked by his missing leg; he shaves, his panic growing. Finally he takes flight, taking with him only the Orloff diamond."

"I am afraid there is a flaw in the theory, Pons," I could not help pointing out, not without triumph. "There is no logic in Parenin's protection of a former Russian nobleman, the enemy of the Soviet whose government Parenin represents."

"Ah, there is little logic in mankind," answered Pons, smiling. "M. Parenin is, I fear, at heart a Royalist. And with no love for Propov, whose innumerable atrocities serve to give any observer in possession of the facts a sense of the fitness of things at his end."

"Then if Parenin wants the Count to escape, how can you promise Jamison that your results will be his?"

"Surely they have always been, haven't they? Whether I wished it or not?"

"But you don't even know where the Count is!"

"No, nor have I any wish to. If Jamison keeps his word to insert the notice I wrote into the dailies, I expect him to call on us without delay."

"Absurd!" I cried. "He will be taken. Why should he come back?"

Pons smiled enigmatically. "Because he took the wrong chessman!"

"What do you mean?"

"Let me suggest that you compare the weight of that queen on the table with this one in my pocket."

He handed both to me.

"The difference in weight is so slight as to be almost imperceptible," continued Pons, "but it exists. The Orloff diamond lies hidden in the broken chessman you hold in your hand."

"But the Count certainly wouldn't make a mistake of that kind," I protested.

"In the circumstances, he did. Look here." He bent and picked up the king. "We assume that the Count took the other king. I submit that this fact is capable of but one interpretation—that the king was also broken. Presumably the Count had originally attempted to conceal the stone in the king, found the king too small, and settled on the queen. In his panic, it was a simple mistake to seize the king instead of the queen; they are not dissimilar in appearance or size. By now he has discovered his mistake; he is therefore certain to return for the broken queen just as soon as he considers that it is safe for him to do so. For that reason alone I persuaded Jamison to send out the notice I wrote.

"We are therefore unlikely to have a visitor before nightfall, following publication of the notice. We may as well spend the time, if you can be spared from your practise for the day, in sleep."

Shortly after eleven o'clock of the night that followed an uneventful day, I felt Pons reach out and touch me lightly on the arm.

"Don't move, Parker," he whispered, "our man is at the side window."

A slight rustling sound reached my ears. Then, in the whiteness of the fog square of window, a figure stood for some minutes in absolute silence. Presently the window began to slide up very slowly to a quarter of its length, when there was a pause for listening. Evidently satisfied that he was unobserved, our nocturnal visitor pushed the window up as far as it could go. Again he listened for some moments; then he reached up, grasped the window-jambs, and pulled himself into the room, where he stood for a hesitant mo-

ment in the darkness, limned against the white fog outside, before he came slightly forward, walking with a pronounced, though carefully hushed, limping sound.

Without warning, Pons turned on his flash. Its bright light struck our visitor full in the face.

"Count Sergei Romanoff, I believe," said Pons. "Will you be seated?"

The Count made a tentative movement toward the window, but I was there before him, and he turned again to Pons, who had leaped to the switch and illuminated the room. The Count stood blinking at Pons in the light; I noticed how well he fitted the description Pons had postulated, and saw too, several places on his chin where he had cut himself while shaving. His hair was somewhat disheveled, and his features were unnaturally pale. His firm lips trembled as he regarded Pons.

"You are not — not police?" he asked hopefully, looking from one to the other of us.

"We are not police," Pons assured him.

The Count sank into a chair. "What do you want of me?"

"You came, I believe, for this," said Pons, extending his hand; the broken chessman lay in his palm.

The Count looked at Pons in sudden terror. "You are not from — the Government?"

"We are not, though we are acting in unofficial capacity for part of it."

"Ah! Who is it then? Is it Parenin? Yes, it is surely Parenin!" he exclaimed.

"Quite so. You know M. Parenin?"

"Yes. As a boy, he was a guard in my father's house. Yes, I know him well. He was the only one in the city who knew of my identity."

"It is unnecessary to tell you that we are in possession of most of the facts of Propov's death. But tell us, how did you encounter him? That is a matter of detail about which we can only speculate."

"In the street, sir. Oh, it was foolish, but I was lonely, very lonely. Parenin could not visit me without arousing suspicion. Propov must have known me at once; he was so unnaturally gracious. I didn't recognize him then, though I knew he had been looking for me since 1923, when I was warned against him in Paris. I cut out a newspaper picture of him then; I thought I would always remember him. But he had grown a beard in the interval; so I didn't realize who he was until we sat down to that game of chess. That was his

second visit to my lodgings. He was left-handed, and I remembered that Propov was left-handed. I studied him then and I became convinced of his identity. Once convinced, I did not hesitate to kill him at once. I shaved then, you know, but that was indicative only of my desperation, for I could not change my leg. And then, in my haste, I picked up the wrong chessman. You know about the diamond, too?"

Pons nodded silently.

"I had tried to put it into the king, but it would not fit: so I put it into the queen. You cannot know the bitter disappointment I suffered until I read the account in the papers this morning." He looked up, eyes narrowed. "It was not true, then? I am in the hands of the police."

"On the contrary, the account was put in expressly to enable you to retrieve the jewel."

"And so that you might take me," replied the Count bitterly.

"It becomes my duty to hand you over to the police, I fear." Pons shrugged his shoulders. "But, of course, this is your property," he continued, handing the chessman to the Count. "I will exchange it for the broken king."

The Count silently handed the king to Pons, who gave it the queen's place in his pocket.

"It will take us a few moments to notify the police, Count Romanoff," said Pons. "For your convenience, I have packed your wallet, your most valuable books, and most of your clothes. You will have time, I daresay, to see whether I have forgotten anything."

The Count's eyes met Pons's briefly. He murmured his thanks for Pons's thoughtfulness in packing his things while he had slept. Then Pons beckoned to me, and together we left the room.

In the hall, Pons went directly to the telephone, where he called the number the Russian Consul had given him.

"M. Parenin?" I heard him say. "Solar Pons here. I called in regard to our problem of last evening. Our quarry is quite safely in our hands, but it might be well to prevent further official pursuit. Early tomorrow morning, please telephone Inspector Seymour Jamison of Scotland Yard and tell him I have delivered into your hands the man known as Landon Hall; assure the Inspector that Hall is already on his way to Russia in the hands of government agents. Above all, make certain that Inspector Jamison is to receive full credit for solving the crime at 37 Woburn Place."

There was a brief pause. Pons chuckled. "Official notice, eh? Inspector Jamison has a great respect for anything official."

Pons turned from the telephone. "I fancy that will satisfy both our client and the estimable Inspector. Now let us see how our prisoner fares."

He looked cautiously into the Count's quarters. There was no one there.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed, "how careless of us! I am afraid our prisoner has escaped."

On the way back to our own quarters, Pons said, "We must be sure to look at the morning papers, Parker. I daresay we shall find the affair chronicled under some such caption as, shall we say, *Inspector Jamison Scores Again!*"

The Adventure of the China Cottage

"MY ESTEEMED BROTHER," said Solar Pons as I walked into our quarters one autumn morning for breakfast, "has a mind several times more perceptive than my own, but he has little patience with the processes of ratiocination. Though there is nothing to indicate it, it was certainly he who sent this packet of papers by special messenger well before you were awake."

He had pushed the breakfast dishes back, having barely touched the food Mrs. Johnson had prepared, and sat studying several pages of manuscript, beside which lay an ordinary calling card bearing the name Randolph Curwen, through which someone had scrawled an imperative question mark in red ink.

Observing the direction of my gaze, Pons went on. "The card was clipped to the papers. Curwen is—or perhaps I had better say 'was'—an expert on foreign affairs, and was known to be a consultant of the Foreign Office in cryptology. He was sixty-nine, a widower, and lived alone in Cadogan Place, Belgravia. A reclusive gentleman, little given to social affairs since the death of his wife nine years ago. There were no children, but he had the reputation for possessing a considerable estate."

"Is he dead, then?" I asked.

"I should not be surprised to learn that he is," said Pons. "I have had a look at the morning papers, but there is no word of him there. Some important discovery about Curwen has been made. These papers, you must have seen, are photographs of some confidential correspondence between members of the German Foreign Office and that of Russia. They would appear to be singularly innocuous, so much so that, I submit, they were sent to Curwen so that he might examine them for any code, since obviously they are not in the customary military codes of either Germany or Russia, which our people have broken long ago."

"I assumed," said an icy voice from the threshold behind me, "that you would have come to the proper conclusion about this data. I came as soon as I could."

Bancroft Pons had come noiselessly into the room, which was no mean feat in view of his weight. His keen eyes were fixed un-

swervingly upon Pons, his austere face frozen into an impassive mask, which added to the impressiveness of his appearance.

"Sir Randolph?" asked Pons.

"Dead," said Bancroft.

"How?"

"We do not yet know."

"The papers?"

"We have some reason to believe that a *rapprochement* between Germany and Russia is in the wind. Since it would be far more in the interests of Germany's containment that Russia be allied to us and the United States, we are naturally anxious to know what impends. We had recourse to Curwen, as one of the most skilled of our cryptographers. He was sent the papers by messenger at noon yesterday."

"I take it he was given the originals."

Bancroft nodded curtly. "There is always the possibility of invisible ink, though our own tests at the office could not turn up any evidence of it. Curwen always liked to work with the originals. You've had a chance to look them over."

"They do not seem to be in code," said Pons. "They appear to be only friendly correspondence between the foreign secretaries, though it is evident that some increase in trade is being contemplated."

"Curwen was to have telephoned me early this morning. When seven o'clock passed without a word from him, I put in a call. I could not get a reply. So we sent Danvers out. The house and the study were locked. Of course, Danvers had skeleton keys which enabled him to get in. He found Curwen dead in his chair at the table, the papers before him. The windows were all locked, though one was open to a locked screen. Danvers thought he detected a chemical odour of some kind; it suggested that someone might have photographed the papers - that kind of odour. But you shall see Curwen. Nothing has been touched. I have a car below. It isn't far to Cadogan Place."

The house in Cadogan Place was austere in its appointments. It was now under heavy police guard; a constable stood in the street before the house, another at the door, and yet another at the door of the study, which was situated at one corner of the front of the house, one pair of windows looking out toward the street, the other into shrubbery-grown grounds to a low stone wall which separated

the building from the adjacent property. The house was Georgian in architecture, with furniture of the same period.

When the study door was unlocked, it revealed a book-lined room, its shelving broken only by windows and a fireplace. The walls of books framed what we had come to see — the great table in the centre of the room, the still-lit lamp, the motionless form of Sir Randolph Curwen, collapsed in his armchair, arms dangling floorward, his head thrown back, his face twisted into an expression of agony. Beside him stood, as if also on guard, a middle-aged bespectacled man whom Bancroft Pons introduced as Hilary Danvers.

"Nothing has been disturbed, sir," said Danvers to Pons's brother.

Bancroft nodded curtly and waved one arm toward the body.

"Sir Randolph, Parker," said Pons. "Your department."

I went around immediately to examine the body. Sir Randolph had been a thin, almost gangling man. A grey moustache decorated his upper lip, and thin grey hair barely concealed his scalp. Pince-nez — one eyeglass broken — dangled from a black silk cord around his neck. He appeared to have died in convulsive agony, but there was certainly no visible wound on his body.

"Heart?" asked Pons.

I shook my head.

He left me to my examination and walked cat-like around the immaculate room. He examined the windows, one after the other, tested the screen on the half-opened window to the grounds, and came to a pause at the fireplace, where he dropped to one knee.

"Something has been burned here," he said.

"Oh, elementary, my dear fellow," said Bancroft peevishly. "A cursory examination suggests that someone burned papers with figures on them — as you can see."

"Not part of the original material?"

"No. We'll collect the ashes and study them, never fear."

Pons rose and came around to the table. He stood to scrutinize it, touching nothing. Most of its top was spread with the papers from the Foreign Office; these were divided into two piles, with one sheet between these piles, this one evidently being the paper Curwen was reading when he was stricken. A pad of notepaper — free of any jottings — was at one side of this paper. The perimeter of the desk was covered by — in clockwise order — an inkwell and pens, a volume on cryptography, a row of books between bookends made of what

appeared to be blocks of waxed mahogany, a carved box which contained pencils, rubbers, scissors, and the like, and finally a small white, rose-decorated cottage of china, with an open box of incense pastilles beside it. Curwen's chair had been pushed slightly back from the table, and around to one side, as if he were making an attempt to rise before death overtook him.

"Well, Parker?" asked Pons impatiently.

"A seizure of some kind," I replied. "But I fear that only a post-mortem can determine the cause of death precisely."

"Can you guess?"

"If I had to guess, I'd say poison."

Pons flashed a glance at his brother. "You mentioned an odour on entrance."

"Mr. Danvers?" prompted Bancroft.

"We believe that the odour emanated from the incense burner."

"Ah, this," said Pons, his hand hovering over the china cottage. He gazed inquiringly at Danvers.

"We have tested for fingerprints, Mr. Pons," said Danvers. "Only Sir Randolph's were found."

Pons lifted the cottage from its base, where, in a little cup, lay the remains of burned pastilles. He bent his hawk-like face toward the cup and sniffed. He looked up with narrowed eyes, picked up the base of the china cottage, and thrust it at me.

"What kind of scent might that be, Parker?"

I followed his example and sniffed. "Almond," I said. "They make these pastilles in all manner of perfumes."

Pons put the china cottage back together and picked up the box of pastilles. "Lilac," he said dryly.

"The room was locked, Mr. Pons," put in Danvers. "No one could possibly have got in, if you're suggesting that someone came and poisoned Sir Randolph."

"Child's play, child's play," muttered Bancroft impatiently. "What did he find in the papers that someone should want to kill him?"

"And leave the papers?" asked Pons.

"Or burn his findings?" from Bancroft.

"You're irritable today," said Pons. "There's nothing here to show that Curwen found anything in the papers."

"On the contrary there is everything to suggest that somehow someone managed entrance into this room, killed Sir Randolph, and burned his notes."

"Why not take them along? If he were clever enough to enter and leave a locked room without a sign to betray him, he must certainly have known that something could be determined from the ashes."

"You have solved it then, Solar?" asked Bancroft sardonically.

"No. But I submit that the papers in the grate were burned by Sir Randolph himself. He tore off what was on his pad and what had accumulated in his wastebasket under the table, emptied the wastebasket into the fireplace, and set fire to the contents. The ashes are substantial. There is among them at least a page or two from *The Times*, no reason for burning which I could adduce on the part of a foreign agent. Yours is the Foreign Office approach—*all is intrigue and espionage.*"

"It is indeed," said Bancroft shortly.

"We shall see," said Pons.

He turned again to the china cottage. "If I may, I should like to take this back to Praed Street." He picked up also the box of pastilles. "And this."

Bancroft stared at him as if he were convinced that Pons had taken leave of his senses.

"This is bone china," Pons said, with a hint of a smile at his lips. "Of Staffordshire origin. It dates, I should say, to the early nineteenth century. Manufactured by Flight, Barr and Barr, of Stafford. This china, though translucent, will tolerate a surprising amount of heat."

"Pray spare me this lecture," said Bancroft icily. "Take it."

Pons thanked him dryly, slipped the box of pastilles into his pocket, and handed the china cottage to me. "Handle it with care, Parker. We shall examine it at our leisure at 7B." He turned again to his brother. "Now, then. Sir Randolph lived alone. Surely there were servants?"

"A Mrs. Claudia Melton came in to clean the house twice a week," said Bancroft. "And there was a man servant by day—Will Davinson. He prepared Sir Randolph's meals and tended to his wants. He has come in, if you wish to question him. If so, let us get about it at once."

"Very well," assented Pons.

Bancroft signaled to the constable who stood at the threshold. The officer turned silently and led us out of the room to the rear quarters, where, in a combination kitchen and breakfast room, there sat waiting a middle-aged man, who, immediately on our

entrance, sprang to his feet and all but clicked his heels together, standing like a ramrod.

"Mr. Davinson," said the constable, "Mr. Solar Pons would like to ask you some questions."

"At your service, sir," said Davinson to Pons.

"Pray sit down, Mr. Davinson."

Davinson regained his chair and sat waiting expectantly. For all the iron-grey hair, the thinning hands, and the deepening lines of his face, his eyes were alert and conveyed the impression of youth the rest of his body belied.

"You were Sir Randolph's batman in the war?" asked Pons abruptly.

"Yes, sir."

"You had reason then to know his habits very well?"

"Yes, sir."

"He seems to have been addicted to the burning of incense."

"He has burned it for as long as I've known him."

"Twenty years?" hazarded Pons.

"Twenty-one."

"You will have had occasion to ascertain how many pastilles a day he customarily burned."

"Sir, he released the fragrant smoke only when he retired to his study. This was usually in the evening. He seldom burned more than three in an evening, and commonly but two."

"His favourite scent?"

"Lilac. But he also had pastilles scented with rose, almond, thyme, and, I believe, lavender. He would buy boxes by the set two dozen of each scent in a box so that he always had a good supply."

Pons took a turn down the room and back. He stood for a few moments in silence, his eyes closed, his right hand pulling at his earlobe.

"Sir Randolph was a reclusive man?"

"He saw very few people."

"Whom did he see in the past fortnight?"

Davinson concentrated for a moment. "His niece, Miss Emily Curwen. She had come to London from her home in Edinburgh and came to call. That was perhaps a trifle over two weeks ago."

"No matter," said Pons. "Go on."

"Mr. Leonard Loveson of Loveson & Fitch in High Holborn.

That was a business matter. Sir Randolph held a mortgage on their place of business."

"Sir Randolph held other such mortgages?"

"I was not in Sir Randolph's confidence, sir, but I believe he did."

"Go on, Mr. Davinson."

"Well, then there was a nephew - a great-nephew, properly speaking, Ronald Lindall, the son of Miss Emily's sister, also from Edinburgh; he was at the house six days ago, paying a courtesy visit, I took it."

He paused.

"Anyone else?"

"Yes," said Davinson hesitantly. "There was a legal gentleman two days ago - all fuss and feathers. They had words, but briefly. Sir Randolph soothed him and sent him off."

"About what did they have words?"

"I believe the matter concerned another of Sir Randolph's mortgages."

"He was a hard man?"

"No, sir. Quite the contrary. More than once he remitted interest due him - even canceled it. And on one occasion he forwent a small mortgage. No, sir, he was far too easy a man to deal with. Some of them took advantage of him."

"Go on."

"I do not remember any more, sir."

Pons took another turn around the room. "Of these people, which were familiar visitors?" he asked then.

"Mr. Loveson."

"You had not seen Miss Emily before?"

"No, sir. Sir Randolph had spoken of her, but she had not visited at any time that I was in this house."

"You admitted her?"

"Yes, sir. Sir Randolph never answered the door. If I had gone unless he had an appointment - he did not answer the door at all."

"Will you cast your mind back to Miss Emily's visit? How did she seem to you?"

"I don't follow you, Mr. Pons."

"Was she composed - sad - gay - what?"

"She seemed to be a trifle agitated, if I may say so. But that was when she left, Mr. Pons. When she came in she was very much a lady."

"She and her uncle had words?"

"I could not say." Davinson was suddenly prim.

"Mr. Lindall, now."

"He was a somewhat truculent young man, but apologetic about disturbing Sir Randolph. They had a pleasant visit. Sir Randolph showed him about the house and garden, and he took his leave."

"Mr. Loveson Do you know, is the mortgage a large one presuming it has not been settled?"

"I don't know, but I had the impression that it is quite large." Davinson swallowed and cleared his throat. "I must emphasize again, Mr. Pons, that while Sir Randolph did not take me into his confidence, I was able to come to certain conclusions about his affairs."

"One could hardly expect otherwise of a companion of such long standing," said Pons.

Davinson inclined his head slightly as if modestly accepting faint praise.

"The gentlemen from the Foreign Office," Pons said then. "Did you admit them?"

"No, sir. They came after I had gone to my flat."

"You answered the telephone while you were here. Do you recall any appointments after your hours during the past two weeks?"

"The foreign gentleman."

"When?"

"Three nights ago."

"Did he leave his name?"

"No, sir. He asked to speak with Sir Randolph. He spoke with a German accent. Sir Randolph was in his study. I made the signal with the buzzer, and Sir Randolph took the call. I stayed on the line just long enough to be sure the connection had been made."

"You heard their conversation?"

"Sir, only enough to know that Sir Randolph was very much surprised. I took it, agreeably. Afterward, he came out and instructed me to prepare some sandwiches and chill some wine. So I knew that he expected someone to come in during the evening. I assumed that it was the foreign gentleman."

Pons nodded. "Your leaving arrangements were by your choice Mr. Davinson?"

"No, sir. That was the way Sir Randolph wished it. He never wanted to be valeted, didn't like it. But he needed someone to do the ordinary things in the house during the day."

"You have your own keys?"

"Yes, Mr. Pons."

"Sir Randolph was secretive?"

"Only about his work. He was a gentleman who, I should say, preferred his own company to that of anyone else. He treated me very well. Indeed, if I may say so, I should not be surprised to find myself mentioned in his will—he hinted as much to me on several occasions, and that ought to be proof enough that he was not unnecessarily secretive."

A smile touched Pons's lips.

Bancroft loomed on the threshold. "Have you learned anything?" he demanded impatiently.

"Gently, brother," said Pons, his eyes twinkling. "These matters take time. But we are done here. Thank you, Mr. Davinson. I may call on you again."

"I want to do anything I can to help, sir. I was very fond of Sir Randolph. We were—if I may say so—almost like step-brothers."

"Was that not an odd way of putting it?" asked Bancroft, when we were walking away from the kitchen. "One says, 'we were like brothers.' Step-brothers, indeed!"

"Probably not, for Davinson," said Pons. "I fancy it was his way of saying that they were like brothers one step removed on the social scale—Sir Randolph being a step up, and he a step down."

Bancroft grunted explosively. "You've frittered away half an hour. To what conclusions have you come?"

"Ah, I daresay it's a trifle early to be certain of very much. I submit, however, that Sir Randolph was murdered by someone he had no reason to fear. Sir Randolph appears to have been a cautious man, one not given to carelessness in the matter of his relationship with the public."

"You have some ingenious theory about the murderer's entrance into and exit from the locked room, no doubt," said Bancroft testily.

"I should hardly call it that. Sir Randolph admitted him, and Sir Randolph saw him out, locking the doors after him. Until we have the post-mortem results, we cannot know precisely how Sir Randolph was done to death."

"We are having the papers gone over once again."

"A waste of time. We have both been through them and found nothing. No more is necessary."

"Nevertheless. . . ."

"Ah, you Foreign Office people think in painfully conventional patterns. I submit the papers have nothing to do with it."

"I have heard you on more than one occasion decry outrageous coincidence, Solar," protested Bancroft. "Surely it is too much to believe that Sir Randolph's possession of these papers at the time of his death amounts only to coincidence?"

"It is indeed an outrageous coincidence, and of a kind I detest," said Pons. "But I am forced to believe it no less."

"Is there anything more here?" asked Bancroft.

"If possible, I should like to have a copy of Sir Randolph's will sent to 7B without delay."

"It will be done."

Back at our quarters, Pons retired at once with the china cottage and the box of pastilles to the corner where he kept his chemicals, while I prepared to go out on my round. When I left 7B, he was in the process of breaking apart one of the scented pastilles; when I returned two hours later, he had broken them all apart and was just rising from his examination, his eyes dancing with the light of discovery.

"You have learned something," I cried.

"Should I not, after two hours?" he asked. "Sir Randolph came to his death by his own hand."

"Suicide!"

"I have not said so. No, one of the pastilles contained cyanide. It was prepared and placed among the pastilles in the box on the desk unknown to him. Since he used not less than two pastilles a day and not more than three, and the box contains normally two dozen pastilles, we can assume that the poisoned pastille was placed there not more than twelve days ago. From the ashes in the china cottage it is possible to determine that the cyanide was enclosed in inflammable wax, and this in turn enclosed in the customary formula—charcoal powder, essence of lilac, gum benzoin, olibanum, storax, and gum tragacanth. Sir Randolph fell victim to a death trap which had been laid for him by someone who both knew his habits and had access to his study."

"I thought it poison. What was the motive?"

"Ah, that's the question. It was certainly not the papers, as was evident the moment I concluded that the incense burner was the source of Sir Randolph's death. That faint odour of almond, you will remember, was indicative."

"His estate then?"

"Ah, we shall just see. Only a few minutes before your return a copy of Sir Randolph's will arrived. I was about to examine it."

He crossed to the table, took up the sealed envelope lying there, and opened it. He stood for a few moments studying the paper he unfolded. "An admirably clear document," he murmured. "To his faithful servant, Will Davinson, twenty-five hundred pounds. To Miss Emily 'who is otherwise provided for,' the sum of five hundred pounds. To Mrs. Claudia Melton, two hundred pounds. The bulk of his estate distributed equally among five charitable institutions. All mortgages revoked!"

"There is certainly not much in the way of motive there," I said.

"Murder has been committed for as little as ten pounds," said Pons. "And less. But hardly with such care and premeditation. I fancy that the stake was considerably more than two or five hundred pounds."

"Davinson had motive and opportunity."

"He could hardly deny it," observed Pons with a crooked smile.

"He knew he was mentioned in the will. He told us as much."

"Chalk up one point against his having planned Sir Randolph's death."

"Surely it's not impossible."

"No, only improbable."

"I recall your saying often that when all the impossible solutions have been eliminated, then whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth."

"We have not yet reached that point, Parker."

"Perhaps, after all, your brother is right."

"He may be," said Pons with that air of knowing very well he was not.

"Davinson spoke of a foreigner, a German, who visited Sir Randolph only a few days before his death."

"We have only Davinson's word for it," said Pons.

"If not, after all, the papers from the Foreign Office, we seem to be left with only Sir Randolph's estate for motive," I pointed out, with some asperity.

"His estate seems to be well accounted for."

"The mortgage holders!" I cried.

"I have thought of them. Even before I saw this document, I suggested that some inquiry be set afoot about them. But I venture to predict it will be disclosed that Sir Randolph did not hold many

unredeemed mortgages, and that the total sum involved is not as large as Davinson, for one, believed."

"The man Loveson?"

"I have not forgotten him. His will very probably turn out to be the largest outstanding mortgage. I am well aware therefore that he may have had motive in addition to having opportunity. The probability, again, is remote, for it must surely have occurred to him, should any thought of killing Sir Randolph have crossed his mind, that his motive would be instantly perceived. Moreover, we have Davinson's word for Sir Randolph's lenience with his debtors—and this is given adequate support by the terms of Sir Randolph's will, revoking his mortgages. No, there is something other here of which we have as yet no inkling—something that induced his murderer to go to great pains to prepare a deadly pastille, secrete it among those on the table during the time of his visit to Sir Randolph—or his secret entry into the house, if it were that—and then be safely away when by chance his victim selected the poisoned pastille for use. It was all very carefully premeditated; there was nothing impulsive about it. That is why, patently, the papers have nothing to do with the matter, for whoever put the pastille into the box did so well before even Sir Randolph knew that he would be sent the papers for examination. By the same process of deduction, the foreign visitor lacked motive—if there were such a visitor."

"And if not?"

"Then, I fear, we should have to put Davinson through it. But there is little reason to doubt Davinson's story. A foreign visitor to Sir Randolph is not unlikely. And Davinson does not seem to me to be capable of so elaborate a plan."

"Who then?"

"We must consider that Davinson was gone by night. Sir Randolph was alone. He could have given entry to anyone he pleased, regardless of what Davinson believes."

"Well, then, we get back to motive."

"Do we not?" said Pons.

So saying, he sank into a reverie, from which he stirred only once—to eat, with a preoccupied air, a lunch Mrs. Johnson sent up—and so he still sat, smoking pipe after pipe of his abominable shag, when at last I went to bed.

Pons's hand at my shoulder woke me while it was yet dark.

"Can you spare the day, Parker?" he asked, when I sat up. "We

have just time to catch the six o'clock from King's Cross for Edinburgh."

"Edinburgh!" I cried, getting out of bed.

"I have an unyielding fancy to learn what the late Sir Randolph and his niece had words about."

"At this hour!"

"Time waits upon no one. We lose a day by traveling later. The six o'clock brings us into Edinburgh by two-thirty this afternoon. We shall have ample opportunity to make our inquiries of Miss Emily Curwen. You will have hours to sleep on the train."

"Miss Emily!" I cried. "For five hundred pounds! Preposterous."

"Unlikely, perhaps, but hardly preposterous," retorted Pons. "Poison, after all, is primarily a woman's weapon."

Pons had already summoned a cab, which waited below. As soon as I had dressed and made arrangements for my *locum tenens* to call on my patients for the next two days, we were off for King's Cross, which we reached only just in time to catch the train for Scotland.

Once in our compartment and northward bound out of London, Pons sank again into cogitation, and I settled myself to resume the sleep Pons had interrupted.

When I woke in the late morning hours, Pons sat watching the lovely countryside flow by. We had crossed the Scottish border, and soon the familiar heights of Arthur's Seat, the Salisbury Crags, the Braid Hills, and Corstorphine Hill would come into view. Here and there little pockets of ground mist still held to the hollows, but the sun shone, and the day promised to be fine.

The tranquil expression of Pons's face told me nothing.

"You cannot have been serious in suggesting that Miss Curwen poisoned her uncle," I said.

"I am not yet in a position to make that suggestion," replied Pons, turning away from the window. "I submit, however, that a curious chain of events offers itself for our consideration. There is nothing to show that Miss Emily visited her uncle at any time previous to her recent visit. Then she comes, they have words, she hurries off, distraught. Does not this suggest anything to you?"

"Obviously they quarreled."

"But what about? Two people who have not seen each other for many years—as far as we know—can hardly, on such short notice, have much to quarrel about."

"Unless there is a matter of long standing between them."

"Capital! Capital, Parker," said Pons, his eyes twinkling. "But what ancient disagreement could exist between uncle and niece?"

"A family estrangement?"

"There is always that possibility," conceded Pons. "I submit, however, that Miss Emily would hardly have come, in that case, unannounced and without an invitation to do so."

"Perhaps, unknown to Davinson, she had been invited to come," I said.

"Perhaps. I am inclined to doubt it. Miss Emily yielded to the impulse to confront her uncle to ask some favour of him. His failure to grant it angered her and she rushed off."

"That is hardly consistent with the premeditation so evident in the careful preparation of a poisoned pastille," I could not help pointing out.

"Granted, Parker. But there's nothing to prevent such premeditation in the event that the favour she asked her uncle were not granted."

"What could it have been that, failing its granting, only his death would serve her?" I protested. "If a matter of long standing, then, why not longer? No, Pons, it won't wash, it won't at all. I fear you have allowed your latent distrust of the sex to darken your view of Miss Emily Curwen."

Pons burst into hearty laughter.

"Where are we bound for then? Do you know?"

"Miss Emily lives in her father's house in Northumberland Street, in the New Town. I took time yesterday to ascertain this and other facts. She and her sister were the only children of Sir Randolph's brother Andrew. Her sister married unwisely, a man who squandered her considerable inheritance; both the elder Lindalls are now dead, survived by an only son, Ronald, who is employed in a bookshop in Torphichen Street which is only a short distance from Princes Street. But here we are, drawing into Waverley."

Within the hour we stood on the stoop of the house in Northumberland Street, waiting upon the doorbell. Pons rang it three times before the door was opened, only a little, and an inquiring face looked out at us.

"Yes?"

"Miss Emily Curwen?"

"Yes?"

"Mr. Solar Pons, of London, at your service. Dr. Parker and I have come about the matter of your uncle's death."

There was a moment of pungent silence. Then the door was flung wide, and Miss Curwen stood there, unmistakably shocked and surprised. "Uncle Randolph dead? I saw him within the month. The picture of health!" she cried "But forgive me! Come in, gentlemen, do."

Miss Emily led the way to the drawing room of the old fashioned mid-nineteenth century house, which was certainly at one time the abode of wealth. She was a woman approaching fifty, with a good figure still, and betraying some evidence in the care she had taken with her chestnut hair and her cosmetics of trying to retain as much of a youthful aspect as possible.

"Please sit down," she said, and suited her own actions to her invitation to us. "And do tell me of uncle's death. What happened? Was it an accident?"

"Perhaps, in a manner of speaking, it was," said Pons. "He was found dead in his study."

"Poor uncle!" she cried, unaffectedly.

She seemed unable to fix her eyes on either Pons or myself, but was constantly wandering in her glance, while at the same time her hands were ever busy, plucking at her dress, or lacing her fingers together, or carrying her fingers to her lips.

"Perhaps you did not know he left you five hundred pounds?"

"No, I did not." Then her eyes brightened quite suddenly. "Poor, dear uncle! He needn't have done that. Now that he's gone, I shall have it all! All!"

"Somewhat over a fortnight ago you called on your uncle, Miss Curwen."

"Yes, I did." She grimaced.

"You found him well at that time?"

"I believe I have said as much, sir."

"You left him, upset. Was he unkind to you?"

"Sir, it was the old matter. Now it is resolved."

"Would you care to tell us about it?"

"Oh, there's no secret in it, I assure you. All the world knows of it here in Edinburgh. I suppose in London it is different. Who, in London, knows if I am alive?" She tossed her head and shrugged, pitying herself briefly. "Uncle Randolph was as hard a man as my father. My older sister Cicely made a very bad marriage in our father's eyes. He had settled her inheritance on her, and when he saw how Arthur wasted it, he made certain I could never do the same. So he put my inheritance - sir, fifty thousand pounds! - in

trust, and made Uncle Randolph guardian of the trust. I could have only so much a year to live on—and you see me, sir, without even a regular maid. A pittance. My father lived frugally; my uncle did likewise. They expected me to do the same. But the world has changed, and everyone knows that it is not so easy to live on a restricted income as it was twenty-five years ago when my father died. But now all that's over and done with—now Uncle Randolph's dead, what's mine comes to me free of his control or anyone else's."

"You must have had assistance, Miss Curwen," said Pons sympathetically.

"Oh, yes. My nephew, my dear boy! He's all I have, gentlemen. He has cared for his old aunt quite as if I were his own mother. I've been very much alone here. What could I do, what society could I have, on so limited an income? Now all that is changed. I am sorry Uncle Randolph is dead, but I'm not sorry the restrictions on my inheritance are removed."

Pons's glance flickered about the room, which looked as if it had not quite emerged into the twentieth century. "A lovely room, Miss Curwen," he observed.

"My grandfather planned it. I hate it," she said simply. "I shall lose no time selling the house. Think of having fifty thousand pounds I might have had when I was in my twenties! Oh, Mr. Pons, how cruel it was! My father thought I'd do the same thing my sister did, even after I saw how it went with them."

"I see you too are given to the use of incense, Miss Curwen," said Pons, his gaze fastened on a china castle.

"Any scent will serve to diminish the mould and mildew, gentlemen."

"May I look at that incense burner?" persisted Pons.

"Please do."

Pons crossed to the mantel where the china castle rested, picked it up, and brought it back to his chair. It was an elaborate creation in bone china, featuring three lichen-covered turrets, and evidently three burners. Carnations adorned it, and a vine of green leaves, and morning glories. Its windows were outlined in soft brown.

"A Colebrook Dale marking on this Coalport castle identifies it as prior to 1850 in origin," said Pons.

Miss Curwen's eyebrows went up. "You're a collector, sir?"

"Only of life's oddities," said Pons. "But I have some interest in antiquities as well. The Coalport burners were produced by John Rose. The leadless glaze is typical of these carefully modeled

burners. So too the carnations." He looked up. "And what scent do you favour, Miss Curwen?"

"Rose."

"One could have guessed that you would select so complimentary a fragrance, Miss Curwen," said Pons.

Miss Curwen blushed prettily as Pons got up to return the china castle to the mantel, where he stood for a few moments with the opened box of pastilles in his hand, inhaling deeply the scent that emanated from it. He appeared to have some difficulty closing the box before he turned once more and came back to where he had been sitting. He did not sit down again.

"I fear we have imposed upon you long enough, Miss Curwen," said Pons.

Miss Emily came to her feet. "I suppose you will take care of such legalities as there are, gentlemen?"

"I fancy Sir Randolph's legal representatives will do that in good time, Miss Curwen," said Pons.

"Oh! I thought. . . ."

"I am sorry to have given you the wrong impression. I am a private inquiry agent, Miss Curwen. There is some question about the manner of your uncle's death; I am endeavouring to answer it."

She was obviously perplexed. "Well, there's nothing I can tell you about that. I know he was in what looked like perfect health when I last saw him."

She did not seem to have the slightest suspicion of Pons's objective, and walked us to the door, where she let us out. From the stoop, we could hear the chain being slid back in place.

"I must hand it to you, Pons," I said. "There's motive for you."

"Poor woman! I'll wager she's dancing around by herself in celebration now," he said as we walked back down to the street. "There are pathetic people in this world to whom the possession of money is everything. All else pales before it. They know little of life and nothing of how to live. Presumably Andrew Curwen was such a one; I fear Miss Emily may be another. One could live well on the income of fifty thousand pounds if one had a mind to, but Miss Emily preferred to pine and grieve and feel sorry for herself. A lonely, deluded woman; I shall be sorry to add to her loneliness, but perhaps her wealth will assuage her. But come, Parker, we have little time to lose. We must be off to the police. With luck, we shall be able to catch one of the night trains back to London."

Inspector Brian McGavick, a dark-faced young man with coal-black hair and sea-blue eyes, joined us when Pons explained his need. He was in plain-clothes, and looked considerably more like an actor than a member of the constabulary.

"I've heard about you, Mr. Pons," said McGavick. "This morning on instructions from the Foreign Office, I am at your service."

"Inspector, you're in charge here. I have no authority. I shall expect you to take whatever action the events of the next hour or two call for." He outlined briefly the circumstances surrounding the murder of Sir Randolph Curwen.

By the time he had finished we had arrived in Torphichen Street.

"Let us just park the car over here," said Pons, "and walk the rest of the way."

We got out of the police car and walked leisurely down the street to a little shop that bore the sign: *Laidlaw's Books*. There Pons turned in.

A stout little man clad formally, save for his plaid weskit, came hurrying up to wait on us.

"Just browsing, sir," said Pons.

The little man bowed and returned to resume his place on a stool at a high, old-fashioned desk in a far corner of the shop. The three of us began to examine the books on the racks and on the shelves, following Pons's lead. Pons soon settled down to a rack containing novels of Sir Walter Scott and Dickens, studying one volume after another with that annoying air of having the entire afternoon in which to do it.

In a quarter of an hour, the door of the shop opened to admit a handsome young man who walked directly back to the rear of the shop, removed his hat and ulster, and came briskly back to attend to us. Since Pons was nearest him, he walked directly up to Pons and engaged him in conversation I could not overhear until I drifted closer.

"There is merit in each," Pons was saying. "Scott for his unparalleled reconstruction of Scotland's past, Dickens for the remarkable range of his characters, however much some of them may seem caricatures. I think of establishing special shelves for each when I open my own shop."

"Ah, you're a bookman, sir? Where?"

"In London. I lack only a partner."

"I would like to be in London myself. What are your qualifications?"

"I need a young man, acquainted with books and authors, capable of putting a little capital into the business. Are you interested?"

"I might be."

Pons thrust forth his hand. "Name's Holmes," he said.

"Lindall," said the young man, taking his hand.

"Capital?" asked Pons.

"I expect to come into some."

"When?"

"Within the next few months."

"Ample time! Now tell me, Mr. Lindall, since I am in need of some other little service, do you know any chemistry?"

"None, sir."

"I asked because I saw a chemist's shop next door. Perhaps you have a friend there who might make up a special prescription for me?"

"As a matter of fact, I do have. A young man named Ardley. Ask for him and say I gave you his name."

"Thank you, thank you. I am grateful. In delicate little matters like these, one cannot be too careful."

Lindall's interest quickened. He ran the tip of his tongue over his lips and asked, "What is the nature of the prescription, sir?"

Pons dipped his hand into his coat pocket, thrust it out before Lindall, and unfolded his fingers. "I need a little pastille like this with cyanide at the centre, to dispose of old men and middle-aged ladies."

Lindall's reaction was extraordinary. He threw up his hands as if to thrust Pons away, stumbled backward, and upset a stall of books. Books and Lindall together went crashing to the floor.

"Oh, I say! I say now!" called out the proprietor, getting off his stool.

"Inspector McGavick, arrest this man for the murder of Sir Randolph Curwen, and the planned murder of his aunt, Miss Emily Curwen," said Pons.

McGavick had already moved in on Lindall, and was pulling him to his feet.

"You will need this poisoned pastille, Inspector. I found it in a box of rose pastilles in Miss Emily's home. You should have no difficulty proving that this and the one that killed Sir Randolph

were manufactured for Lindall at his direction." To Lindall, Pons added, "A pity you didn't ask after my Christian name, Mr. Lindall. *Sherlock* A name I assume on those special occasions when I feel inordinately immodest."

In our compartment on the 10:15 express for London Pons answered the questions with which I pelted him.

"It was an elementary matter, Parker," he said, "confused by the coincidence of Sir Randolph's possession of the Foreign Office papers, which could not have been the motivating factor in his death since the death trap had been laid for him well before anyone at all knew that he would see the papers in question. This motive eliminated, it became necessary to disclose another. Nobody appeared to dislike Sir Randolph, whose existence was uncomplicated and relatively reclusive, and it did not seem that any adequate motivation lay in the provisions of his will, for charitable institutions have no need to turn to murder for their funds.

"We were left, then, with Miss Emily's curious visit, angrily terminated, about which, as you saw, she made no mystery. Had she wished earnestly to break her father's trust provision, she could have resorted to litigation. There is no record that she did so. She went to London to appeal to her uncle for an end to the trust as she had appealed by letter previously. She came back and complained to her nephew - her 'dear boy' who is 'all' she has and clearly her designated heir, as an examination of her will will certainly show. In a fortnight, familiarized with Sir Randolph's habits by Miss Emily, he paid him a visit on his own, managed to slip the poisoned pastille into his box, and was off to bide his time. He had had two made, one for his aunt, and felt safe in slipping the other into her box of pastilles. He might better have waited a sensible time, even though he allowed for his aunt's less frequent use of incense to delay her death to what he, in his avarice, considered a reasonable time after her uncle's death. He had not counted on the death of Sir Randolph being taken for anything but a seizure of some kind. He underestimated the police, I fear, and greed pushed him too fast. 'The love of money,' Parker, is indeed 'the root of all evil.' "

The Adventure of the Black Cardinal

"THAT UNBELIEVABLE CONSPIRACY," Solar Pons was accustomed to call the affair of the Black Cardinal, which began for me early in January of a year which must remain nameless. I had spent Christmas in the Austrian capital, attending a medical conference there. As I was preparing to entrain for Calais a week later, I received an enigmatic wire from Pons, instructing me to present myself at a certain address in Vienna and accept papers which would be ready for me. As usual, there was no word of explanation, and the hour set was so near that I had no alternative but to leave my hotel at once and hail a carriage.

I gave the driver the Ringstrasse address Pons had given me.

The driver looked at me with curious hesitation. "*Haben sie es recht?*" he asked.

"*Gehen sie nur,*" I replied, irritated.

He bowed elaborately and closed the door. Then he mounted his box, and in a few moments we were rattling away down the avenue toward the mysterious address Pons had wired me. Our destination was not too far from my hotel, through broad avenues and shadowy byways, but it had begun to rain when at last we pulled up before a wrought-iron gate, which was the only opening in a formidable ten-foot wall of stone that ran the length of the entire street on both sides of the gate where two young men stood at stiff attention in military uniform.

Something of my driver's uncertainty communicated itself to me; I turned apprehensively toward him, as if to assure myself that this was indeed the correct address. He sensed my unspoken question and nodded, not without a certain self-satisfaction at what must obviously, to him, have been my error. Summoning my courage, I approached the gate beneath my driver's dubious eyes. At once the guards stepped forward and crossed their guns to bar my way.

"*Nicht vorbei!*" exclaimed one of them.

Fortunately, I had brought Pons's wire with me. I now proffered it. One of the guards stepped back and struck the gate three times sharply with the butt of his gun. Then he came forward once more, and together the two of them scrutinized the paper carefully.

shielding it from rain. A few minutes passed in silence; then a muffled sound fell to ear from the other side of the gate. A white face peered out between the bars. A hand was stretched forth and received my wire from Pons. It was withdrawn, and the face vanished into the darkness.

More minutes passed, during which the guards maintained a stolid immobility. My wonderment was mingled with some irritation at Pons for having thrust me into what must surely be a matter of some importance without any explanation to guide me. At last the gate creaked open, and I was ushered through.

I found myself now in a large rambling garden, in the background of which rose an antiquated but impressive building, toward which my guide led his silent way. I followed as silently, casting a hurried glance around. To my left I could see tall white streams of water playing from a group of fountains dimly illuminated by a trio of post-lights.

My observations were cut short when we ascended a short flight of stone steps, walked a distance along a balcony-like colonnade, and drew up before a heavy, double-paneled door, which my guide opened for me to enter. I stepped inside; the door closed behind me; I could hear my guide's retreating footsteps.

From the far end of the long hall in which I now found myself came a man clad in a long robe, which, as he approached, I recognized as the habit of the Augustinian friars. He came up to me, bowed slightly, and addressed me in English.

"Please follow me, Dr. Parker. His Eminence and His Excellency are expecting you."

I followed him as he returned the way he had come, but I was now more bewildered than before. The presence of this friar, coupled with the tone of respect with which he had uttered "His Eminence," suggested a Cardinal of the Roman Catholic Church. And "His Excellency" could refer to no one but a high official in the Austrian government. Then I recognized my imperfect mental picture of this old house with its group of illuminated fountains and enclosed gardens. I was in the residence of the Archbishop of Vons, chief minister of the Austrian state.

My guide paused before a green baize door, on which he rapped sharply. An answer I did not hear must have come to his ears, for he opened the door and stepped aside, motioning me to enter. I stepped into a darkened room. As I walked forward, two white faces looked toward me from the far side of a huge table.

I had no difficulty recognizing the piercing eyes of the stern man in black who sat on the left, gazing steadily at me through his pince-nez. The other was dressed in a Cardinal's habit, and though I had never seen him, I assumed that he was none other than Cardinal Hoffman, Archbishop of Vienna; his ascetic face seemed more kindly than his companion's, and his eyes twinkled with amusement at what must have been obvious embarrassment on my part.

"Please sit there, Dr. Parker," said the Prime Minister, indicating a chair on my side of the table. Turning, he addressed his clerical superior, "Will you speak, Eminence?"

The Cardinal nodded, bent forward, and singled out a sealed envelope from among the mass of papers arranged on the broad table. He laid it before me. In the dim light at the table, I saw that it was sealed with the arms of Austria and addressed in a cramped hand to Solar Pons.

"I do not know," said the Cardinal in a soft, well-modulated voice, "whether you are aware of the importance of your mission to us. If so, it is well; if not, I can tell you very little, and your natural curiosity must rest until Mr. Pons sees fit to explain the matter. It should not be necessary to impress upon you the vital importance of this packet in furthering Mr. Pons's investigation."

"I understand," I answered, a little nettled at what I thought unnecessary mystery. "But I should prefer not to travel in total ignorance."

Cardinal Hoffman smiled. "Mr. Pons," he said gently, "has been engaged by His Holiness to find an individual known as the Black Cardinal, a man posing as one of us, who has been stirring up dangerous anti-religious feeling throughout the Continent. He seems to be centering his attention on England at the moment, and the apt suggestion to retain Mr. Pons made by Cardinal Latmer was immediately adopted by His Holiness and the Sacred College."

The Prime Minister now touched a bell-button on the table to signify that our all-too-brief interview was at an end. I rose and bowed. Behind me, the green baize door swung silently open, diffusing through the room the pale yellow light from the hall.

In a few moments I found myself once more in the dark street, with the two impassive guards staring at me in some curiosity. I saw that my cab had been detained, and lost no time making my way back to my hotel, and from there, taking time only to send a short wire to Pons setting down the hour of my arrival in London, to the

airport, for I had already packed in my previous anticipation of entraining for Calais.

Pons met me at Croydon. His brisk manner gave no indication of the nature of his current problem.

"You've brought the envelope, Parker?"

"Your wire caught me just in time to permit a change of plan," I said. I handed the packet over to him.

He slipped it into an inner pocket without so much as glancing at it, only nodding in satisfaction. Then his keen eyes swept the beacon-lit airfield as if in search of someone, after which he rushed me through the struggling crowds to a waiting cab, and in a few moments we were speeding toward London.

I was relieved and relaxed to be in our familiar quarters at 7B Praed Street once more, with the ever forebearing Mrs. Johnson serving us a late breakfast in those pleasantly warm surroundings. I could hardly wait, however, to ask Pons about the problem which had prompted his wire to me in Vienna, and I did so as soon as Mrs. Johnson left us alone.

"Ah, it's a tantalizing little matter," he said offhandedly, "but with decidedly serious possibilities. I do not as yet view it as gravely as the Vatican does, but then, there is a difference in perspective. I may say that ever since Cardinal Latmer called upon me and laid before me the problem as His Holiness viewed it, I have been working constantly. I've never before worked so much and accomplished so little."

Pons pushed back from the table, went over to his files, and drew out a thick packet of newspaper cuttings which he threw down before me. I saw at a glance that the packet was composed of numerous lesser packets of cuttings, each held in a rubber-band.

"Just glance over the headlines of any group of these, Parker," said Pons.

The extracts had been cut from many Continental papers, as well as from American and British periodicals. It needed but a cursory examination to reveal that the headlines were of a most foreboding tone—*Vatican Attacked by Spanish Government in Sharp Note*, *Anti-Catholic Feeling Rising on Continent*, *Russian Foreign Office Flays Papacy*, *Catholic Cardinal Predicts Religious War*, *Fascist Ties to Vatican*, and the like.

"What does it all mean?" I asked.

"It would seem to be the work of one man, operating through

puppets and petty criminals not worth the trouble to find," said Pons. "As nearly as I can ascertain, he operates a rumour factory and he plants rumours carefully designed to inflame suspicion and prejudices, which always exist in regard to the Catholic Church, as you know. He has called himself variously 'Cardinal Niger' and 'Cardinal de Noir' hence the 'Black Cardinal.' Now and then he has been audacious enough to send supposedly official announcements to the press on his own stationery, and it is no tribute to the newspapers that these announcements have been taken as *bona fide*, and printed for the members of the College of Cardinals are all well known, their names can be ascertained with only a little trouble, and the absence of a Cardinal Niger or a Cardinal de Noir from that College could be proved with only a minimum of effort. But in the main he tends to rely upon rumour mills and those inevitable 'reliable sources' on which the wildest rumours are blamed."

"But surely no responsible person takes such stories seriously," I said.

Pons shrugged. "One cannot count on the affairs of our world being conducted only by responsible persons. The danger is not in these wild rumours *per se*, but in the possibility that they may be seized upon as a pretext for violence against the Roman Church. You know how uneasy the German situation is, what with the post-war privations and economic difficulties which the Allies have never properly resolved, due largely to the intransigence of France - and, I must admit in part to our own country. Moreover, there is still fresh in many minds the unhappy role of the Vatican, which unwittingly harboured a spy for the Central Powers in the person of Msgr. Rudolph Gerlach."

"I recall the incident," I said.

"Even more recently," Pons continued, "there has been the struggle within the church between the Modernists and the Integralists. The Modernism movement began under Leo XIII, as a determination to recognize and adapt the church to contemporary realities within the framework of traditional Catholicism, of course. The movement had developed under Pius IX but Pius X took a stand against it and specifically condemned it in 1907 in his *Pascendi* encyclical. This resulted in driving the movement underground. The Integralists, who opposed the Modernists, organized a secret society, the *Sodalitium Pianum*, designed to bring to light the activities of the Modernists. The centre in Rome

was led by Msgr. Umberto Benigni, who used his paper, *Correspondenza Romana* later *La Correspondance de Rome* as well as other lesser papers to reprint confidential reports on the Modernists and the activities of the Integralists, all of whom were disguised by pseudonyms. Benigni and his paper carried on a campaign of vilification against the Modernists, whose most potent voice was that of Cardinal Rampolla. The Integralists flourished until Cardinal del Val, then Secretary of State, became aware of the Rome centre, and carried his opposition to Benedict XV, who in his first encyclical, *Ad Beatissimi*, late in 1914, condemned Integralism, hard upon Cardinal del Val's suppression of *La Correspondance de Rome*. Only so recently as 1921, Benedict XV declared the *Sodalitium Pianum* defunct. It is understandable that the Church might wonder whether the present activities of the individual known as the Black Cardinal are not a further outcropping of this internal struggle in the hierarchy."

"Do you think so?" I asked.

Pons shook his head. "It seems wholly unlikely. I took the trouble to look up some of the figures of the struggle. Cardinal Rampolla is dead. Benigni turned his by no means inconsiderable talents to writing the social history of the Catholic Church, and now lives in retirement in Rome, his health failing. No, I think we have in the Black Cardinal an individual obsessed with hatred for the Roman Church, one by no means untalented in his ability to stir prejudices and inflame street rioting. He must also have means at his disposal. I should guess him to be an unfrocked cleric."

"If I may interrupt your train of thought," I put in, "what is in that envelope I brought from Vienna?"

"Detailed reports on the Black Cardinal's activities in Austria, compiled by the *Polizei* of that country. He evidently began his work there, but the Austrian Prime Minister, as a Bishop of the Church, was not slow to understand the direction taken by the spurious Cardinal, and the work of the police soon made Austria too uncomfortable for him. Of his activities in France and Germany, less is known - but newspaper headlines tell us all we need to know. What is important is that we have every assurance that the Black Cardinal is now in London. The unpleasant part of his activities as the Black Cardinal knows is that to the inexperienced layman, it is made to look as if a Catholic plot were burgeoning."

"Have the police any clue to his description?"

"From Austria we have only the slightest indication. He is described as tall—well, tall men are common in England, perhaps more so than on the Continent. He is referred to by some people as benign in appearance, by others as sinister in aspect, which only suggests that our man is a consummate actor, which I have no doubt he is."

"What has been done to turn him up in London?" I asked then.

"All the customary avenues of information have been explored. I dispatched Frick and some of his friends to make the rounds of the underworld. I had some hope of discovering something of use in Limehouse or Whitechapel, though the hope was dim, for our man did not seem likely to have accomplices there. Frick found nothing, of course. Scotland Yard sent Dunstan and his sophisticated crew to move about in higher circles. Nothing came of this either. And my brother has not been idle at the Foreign Office." He shrugged. "All to no end, save the usual farcical events which always attend such matters—like the Park Lane servant who had had the bad grace to suggest that cardinal red as a colour for the cardinalate smacked too strongly of royalty and to propose that cardinals in the future wear black. The poor fellow was frightened out of his wits by the Yard and had to be freed at once."

The sound of the outer bell attended Pons's words.

Pons glanced at the clock on the crowded mantel. "That will be Inspector Jamison, right on time."

In a moment the portly Inspector crossed our threshold, looking as self-important as always. "Glad to see you back, Doctor," he said to me, after he had greeted Pons.

"I observe by your manner that you have nothing to report," said Pons crisply.

"I don't know how you do it, Pons," said Jamison. "But you're right—nothing's the answer, nothing at all. To tell the truth, I'm beginning to think there's no such person at all."

"You've been at it for three days," said Pons. "And turned up nothing in all London?"

"Done no better than you, Pons," said Jamison, not without some satisfaction. "Unless you count those little mistakes—like the cab-driver."

"Cab-driver? Tell me about him."

"A slow witted fellow. Said he'd driven a man who wore nothing but black robes to the home of Cardinal Latmer." Jamison chuckled. "Well, we took him out there over my protests, and of

course he identified one of His Eminence's priests as the arch-criminal."

Pons smiled thinly.

"He thought as he had picked him up at the docks. . . ." began Jamison.

"Has a general alarm gone out?" Pons interrupted.

"No, nothing of that kind, Pons. We've sent word only to public carriers. After all, the fellow has to move about somehow."

Pons grimaced. "With so little description, too! A futile move. It only results in giving us less time than I thought we had. Once he is aware, he can slip out of the country with ease."

Jamison shrugged this off. "What troubles me, Pons—how does this man work? How can one man set the stage for—well, call it a religious war?"

"By preying upon the prejudices and biases which afflict us all," answered Pons. "You know his methods—how he approaches gullible Catholics, sometimes in priestly garb, and proposes sending out notices, cleverly associated in exaggerated form with some incident of little importance—how he directs notices to the press under a false letterhead and the like. Some of his agents have been caught, only to turn out to be dupes—innocent people who had been persuaded to believe that they were working for Rome. He has used gullible Catholics in lesser positions in governmental offices, and there is some reason to believe that minority parties, like the Communists, have been playing a hand here and there."

"I think we are justified in assuming the Black Cardinal to be a man of great wealth—since otherwise he would have to have some organization to supply money for his activities. There is thus far no evidence to support the belief that any organization is connected with his plans. His capture therefore will end the 'conspiracy.'"

"If only we knew who he might be!" said Jamison.

"Knowing who he is is not nearly as important as knowing where he is," said Pons. "He could be the former Fr Jannichon, unfrocked four years ago; ex-Bishop Vradlica, whose whereabouts are unknown since he left the Danube Valley three years ago; he could be Msgr. Schleicher, once of Berlin, and known to have been active in intrigue during the last war. There are half a dozen others." He spread his hands in futility. "But now, if you will excuse me, Jamison, I must be on my way to Ambrosden Avenue."

"Let us hear from you, Pons," said Jamison, preparing to take his leave.

Within moments Pons, clad in his deerstalker and Inverness cape, and I were on our way by cab down Edgware Road toward Victoria Street and Westminster.

At the home of Cardinal Latmer, we were shown into a small, darkened room manifestly deep in the house, for we had walked a lengthy corridor to reach it. There was no window, and the panel through which we had entered seemed to be the room's only entrance, though it might well have been that one or more of the other panels bordering the wall were also disguised doors.

The prelate we had come to see sat at a combination desk and table near the wall opposite the door, backed by heavy portieres; he was an old man, tall and gaunt; he wore horn-rimmed glasses, and, in the glow of the small lamp which illuminated that part of the room in which he sat, he wore an air of great and benign composure, so often to be noticed in the hierarchy. He did not wait for us to speak.

"I am glad to see you again, Mr. Pons," he said. "I am at your service in this matter at the express order of His Holiness. How can I help you?"

Pons introduced me. He acknowledged the introduction graciously, but with the patent understanding that his business was with Pons. Curiously, the first instinct aroused by the prelate at this proximity was a professional one; I was forcibly struck by the old man's extreme nervousness, which stood out in my sight. His fingers were so unsteady as to appear palsied, and his lips twitched often, while his eyes blinked rapidly.

"I have had time to study the papers sent from Rome," said Pons, "and it seems to me as it did to Cardinal del Val that the man who best fits the description and qualities of the Black Cardinal is ex-Bishop Vradlica. What can you tell me of him up to the time of his excommunication?"

"His activities prior to 1914 can hardly be of interest to you, Mr. Pons," said the Cardinal. "At that time he had been a bishop for seven years. With war imminent, he began to appeal to Rome to come actively into the Balkan situation. You know, surely, how abhorrent the very thought of war was to the late Pope, and it must be evident to you, then, how much he was distressed by this appeal from Bishop Vradlica—as he was later by disclosure of the activities of Msgr. Gerlach."

"No one aware of events could question the sincerity of that saintly Pope in his efforts toward peace," said Pons.

"I was at that time working in the Vatican Library," continued Cardinal Latmer, "and had frequent opportunities to read and discuss his letters with other clergymen. I had not at that time been elevated to the Cardinalate, of course. Bishop Vradlica's letters were very powerful in their appeal, and in some ways cogent in the argument that the Church could gain by allying itself actively with the Continental coalition then in formation. I need hardly tell you that Bishop Vradlica found no sympathy in His Holiness, who instructed the Papal Secretary to warn the Bishop that such entreaties must cease, and that his thoughts must turn from terrestrial matters to a higher plane.

"For some time, then, nothing more was heard from Vradlica. Then the man opened a new correspondence directly with the Secretary of State. At the same time, other influential members of the Cardinalate began to receive urgent communications from Vradlica. His letters clearly proved that Bishop Vradlica had gone ahead on his own authority to begin negotiations with Austrian and Hungarian secret agents, and Cardinals Colonna and Valdini appealed to Benedict to take some drastic action, particularly since war had now actually broken out, and the activities of the Bishop were putting the Church in a most awkward position, at a time when His Holiness had publicly appealed to the nations to submit their problems to arbitration.

"His Holiness took no action for two weeks, pending the arrival of further reports. When these came, only confirming the Vatican's worst fears in regard to the Bishop's activities, Benedict sent the Bishop a formal order to abandon his activities under threat of excommunication. This is the customary procedure in such matters. Mr. Pons, Rome is extremely reluctant to invoke the action of excommunication, and gives the offender every opportunity to repent.

"Bishop Vradlica defied His Holiness. He was excommunicated, and soon after dropped from sight, though we assumed that he had retired to his ancestral estates."

"He was, then, independently wealthy?"

"Mr. Pons, he was a member of an old Hungarian family. He was the only heir to a substantial fortune."

Pons meditated for a few moments. Then he spoke again. "You say you had opportunities to read some of Bishop Vradlica's letters. What would you say of them as letters?"

"Oh, sound, Mr. Pons, very sound—so much in his favour," said the prelate. "But I think they expressed clearly what is called a

power complex. There was great yearning after power in his letters. It was the declaration of that ego which recognizes no barrier and no power greater than its own. And with time they grew increasingly arrogant."

"And distraught?"

"Perhaps. This could be said, of course. The letters gave evidence of a shrewd, calculating, ruthless mind. Cardinal Colonna believed Vradlica to be mad."

"And you?"

Cardinal Latmer shrugged. "I am no judge."

"Did his proposals to His Holiness seem feasible to you?"

"Feasible, but stupendous, Mr. Pons."

Answer followed question, and question answer. My attention wandered to the prelate's nervous fingers. He seemed to be insistently tapping the flat arms of the chair in which he sat, and his right index finger was engaged in tracing over and over again some kind of design. Pons's eyes fell to the restless fingers, whenever he looked away from the Cardinal, the prelate's fingers tapped sharply as if to command his attention again.

I studied his face. The prelate seemed pale even in the diminished light of the room. And perhaps a little drawn, as if he were overly tired. I thought him physically run down, perhaps even ill, and glanced at Pons to determine how long this interview might yet take.

But at this moment the Cardinal began to cough, and, as if at a signal, the portieres behind him parted. I caught a glimpse of an open panel behind them as a tall, stoop-shouldered priest stepped into the room and came forward with tender solicitude to stand behind the prelate's chair.

"Forgive me, gentlemen," he said softly, "it is not good for His Eminence to talk so much. He is not as well as he should be. If you will excuse him, he should rest."

"There is nothing further," said Pons, rising at once to go.

The priest was evidently the Cardinal's personal physician. He was a man no longer young, with dark, lustrous eyes. He favoured us with but a fleeting smile and turned anxiously to his charge.

His Eminence bowed in farewell, and we left the room.

The priest who had conducted us to the prelate's room still waited outside his door.

"How did you find His Eminence?" he asked anxiously.

"Well," said Pons shortly.

"He has been virtually in isolation for a month," said the priest, "at work on a monograph. He gave orders that he was not to be disturbed, and, save for his physician, no one has seen him except on his obligations. Even you would not have been received, had it not been for the orders from the Vatican."

"Are not princes of the Church always at the service of bishops, archbishops, and priests responsible to them?" asked Pons.

"In ordinary cases, yes, sir."

We were shown out to Ambrosden Avenue. I was about to hail a cab when Pons stopped me.

"As long as we are in the vicinity, let us just stop in at Bancroft's office."

We made our way to Whitehall, and there, after some difficulty—far more than we had encountered at Ambrosden Avenue—we found ourselves in the little cubicle in the cryptography department which served Pons's seldom seen brother as an office.

Bancroft Pons looked out from behind a desk piled high with papers of all kinds, and surrounded by other papers. Even this tall, formidable man was dwarfed by the evidence of work surrounding him. He was not pleased to see us, and showed it.

"Solar, you impose on me," he said. "You have permitted this trifling matter of the Black Cardinal to persuade you to disregard my rules. I come to see you, not the other way round."

Pons only smiled. "I'm happy to see you your usual cantankerous self."

"Spare me your wit, Solar. I can give you one minute, which hardly allows for your conversation. You have Dr. Parker to run your errands. I am as aware, you see, of what goes on in Vienna as I am of what takes place in Rome. As for this little matter of the Black Cardinal—he can be in one of only two places—either down very deep or up very high. Let me call your attention to Mr. Edgar Allan Poe's story, 'The Purloined Letter.' "

"I know it well."

"Good, I need say no more. It only depends then on which letter rack."

We were dismissed with the wave of a hand.

Bancroft Pons called after us, "There will be a cab waiting for you out in front."

And so there was.

Back in our quarters at 7B Praed Street, with Pons clad in his

mouse-coloured dressing-gown and ensconced in his favourite chair. we sat considering the problem in hand.

"You noticed Cardinal Latmer's tension, Parker?" asked Pons.

"I certainly did. Nothing would please me more, professionally, than to have him under observation for a while. Such striking features! I couldn't help noticing that his physician. . . ."

Pons looked up quickly. "You took the priest for his physician?"

"So he struck me. He was extremely solicitous of the Cardinal."

"Hm. His Eminence seemed ill to you?"

"Let me say rather that he seemed under exhausting strain."

"In seclusion writing a monograph," mused Pons. "I saw no evidence of it."

"Nor I. But there were drawers in his desk in which the manuscript could have been kept."

"And the Cardinal's general pallor suggests that he has not been out of the house for some time. He seemed actually a little underfed."

"What, specifically, caught your eye?" pressed Pons.

"His right index finger."

"You saw it then?"

"I could hardly help noticing its insistence. You regard it as important?"

"I submit that His Eminence was trying to tell us something he could not put into words," said Pons.

"Absurd! We were in his private study, adjoining his bedroom. It must be soundproof. Why should he not be able to speak?"

"I shall know that when I learn what it was he was trying to tell us. You undoubtedly noticed how he drew attention again and again to his finger by tapping on the arm of the chair?"

"A subconscious nervous reaction," I said.

"Come, come, Parker. It was to draw attention to the design he was indicating."

"I saw no design."

"I am not surprised. Yet he constructed it over and over—a simple circle with a right angle drawn in its centre. It reminded me of that childish puzzle of the man in the fenced-in space." As he spoke, he reached over to the table for an envelope and a pencil. "Like this," he said, drawing rapidly.

I gazed at the drawing he had made—a circle with a sort of check-mark in it.

"Meaningless," I said.

Pons shook his head. "On the contrary. He drew it almost without variation."

"Almost?"

"I observed that at intervals the Cardinal appeared to go through the construction of making cuts in his circling line, then closing them again. No more."

"You've read more into this than you were meant to read."

"I've not read enough," said Pons.

I watched him continue to draw designs on the envelope, then turned to take up a medical tome I had begun to read well before my Continental sojourn. I had hardly read more than a half-dozen pages, when I was aroused from my engrossment by a hoarse shout from Pons. I looked up, startled.

Pons stood with one hand clapped to his head, while in the other he held the envelope, which was, I now saw, covered with replicas of the design Cardinal Latmer had outlined with his finger.

"Now what?" I asked.

"I have it!" he cried. "How blind I have been! Bancroft was right." He thrust the envelope before my eyes. "Look at it—it's not a right angle in the circle; it's the letter *L*, the capital *L*."

I looked at him in astonishment. "That conveys little to me," I said.

He paid no attention. He strode rapidly to the telephone and called Scotland Yard to ask for Inspector Jamison.

"Are you there, Jamison? Come over to 7B, will you? I have my finger on our man and need your men to take him in."

Pons's casual announcement sent me scrambling after the envelope he had dropped, curious to learn how he had made anything of this simple design. I stared at it, bewildered.

"Supposing this isn't a right angle, but a capital *L*," I said. "Where is the hidden message?"

"Elementary, my dear Parker. You're looking too hard—as I was initially. The thing is too simple. *L* stands for the Cardinal's name, the circle stands for his prison."

I looked open mouthed at Pons. "Then it follows that his physician is his keeper," I said.

"And the Black Cardinal."

"Incredible!"

"Not so," retorted Pons. "Consider—for the past month Cardinal Latmer has been largely incommunicado, presumably engaged on a monograph. According to information transmitted to us, the Black

Cardinal has been in England approximately a month. What more natural than that he should take the citadel of the enemy by seizing the Primate of all England? To hide himself in the bosom of the Church he would destroy is the acme of cunning. This is the gambit Bancroft had reference to—the purloined letter in Poe's story was in plain sight in the letter-rack, only under cover of another envelope. So it is with the Black Cardinal."

"Still incredible," I cried.

"Not at all," replied Pons. "Let us reconstruct the circumstances as they very probably occurred. Vradlica came in the guise of a priest or bishop on a visit to the Primate. He gains admittance to the prelate's study, which, as you observed, leads off into his private chambers. Once alone with Cardinal Latmer, Vradlica forces him to submit. This is much more simple than you imagine, the Black Cardinal must only capture the Primate and hold him prisoner in his own quarters, and once he has seen to it that the order goes out that the Primate is not to be disturbed, he is safely in charge."

"But we had no difficulty gaining admittance," I protested.

"Such a contingency was prepared for, as you saw, by the attending presence of the Black Cardinal, concealed behind the Cardinal. You could hardly help noticing that the Primate had just time to fulfil his obligation to any Vatican directive in regard to my interview, when the Black Cardinal, acting as physician, appeared and made it clear that we should go."

"These things are always far clearer to you than they are to me," I said.

Pons smiled. "Well put, Parker. That is why I am the private inquiry agent, and you are the doctor."

"And the business with the index finger?" I asked.

"You will remember that I said his little design reminded me of the childish game of the man in the fenced-in space, the problem is, find a way out without having the man climb the fence. The principle of the maze. The circle suggested an enclosure, the cuts he indicated, open doors which were nevertheless closed; the *L* at the centre—all spoke as clearly as need be: 'I am imprisoned in my own house'." Pons shook his head disgustedly. "How unfortunate that I failed to read him correctly at the time. I could have bagged the Black Cardinal when he came to take the Primate again into his charge!"

From outside came the sound of hastily applied brakes and the slam of a car door. Hard after came footsteps pelting up the stairs.

"That will be Jamison," said Pons.

Inspector Jamison threw open the door to our quarters and entered the room. "Where is he, Pons?" he asked.

"In Cardinal Latmer's house on Ambrosden Avenue," answered Pons.

Jamison fell back, his face flushing. "Alone?" he cried, incredulous.

"Alone," answered Pons. "He is holding the Primate prisoner."

Pons gave Jamison no time to protest, but launched into a detailed explanation.

"We'll take him at once," said Jamison, when Pons finished.

"Gently, gently, Jamison," cautioned Pons. "We must not fail in this. At the very least, this fellow is an international nuisance - at the worst, he is capable of provoking a bloody religious war. I propose that you set up a cordon around the Cardinal's residence and also the cathedral - there is doubtless a passage connecting them. Parker and I will go to the house once more and ask to see His Eminence - we must do all we can to prevent his being harmed, even though our reappearance there may put Vradlica on guard and cause him to flee, for your men to take him, for he must emerge either from the house or the cathedral."

Jamison's dubiety showed plainly on his rotund face. "How much time will you need?" he asked.

"Give us twenty minutes. If we're not out in that time, you and your men come in."

"I don't like it, Pons, but I'll agree to it. We'll need time to place our men."

Pons glanced at the clock on the mantel. "Shall we say seven o'clock?"

"Seven o'clock it is."

Promptly at that hour, we presented ourselves at the house on Ambrosden Avenue. We were admitted without question, though the young cleric showed some surprise at the untimeliness of our visit. He listened impassively to Pons's request to see the Primate on a matter of some urgency, making no secret of his doubt that we would be received.

"I will see, gentlemen. Please be seated."

He hurried away.

Three minutes passed before he returned. "His Eminence will see you now," he said.

Pons flashed me a quixotic glance. Evidently our quarry had not become suspicious.

We were shown to the same room where we had visited the

Primate that morning. The lights, however, were very low, so that it was difficult to adjust our eyes to the darkness. But once the door had shut behind us, the lights were turned up only to disclose before us, with his back to the prelate's desk, not His Eminence, but the man we had come to take, looking at us coldly and not without amusement from above the gleaming barrel of a revolver.

"Ah, Mr. Solar Pons, we meet without dissembling," he said. "Not really our first meeting — but very probably our last."

I saw now that our quarry had affected his robes; he stood in princely splendour, with the gleam of madness clear in his eyes.

"You realize, of course — you are surrounded," said Pons.

The Black Cardinal bowed. "The house, Mr. Pons — I am not. I do not intend to be taken. At this point, it would hardly be convenient for any government to allow me life. In less than five minutes, I will be on the river. The United States — Boston, perhaps — will offer me haven. I can begin my private war anew."

He stepped backward around the desk.

I gathered myself for a leap. Even the capture of the Black Cardinal was not sufficient price for Pons's life.

"You cannot shoot us both," I said.

The Black Cardinal laughed harshly. Then, instead of pulling the trigger, he threw the weapon at Pons, and vanished behind the portieres. Pons caught the weapon, aimed it, and pulled the trigger. There was no explosion. The weapon was empty!

Pons flung himself through the portieres upon the panel. His deft fingers traveled swiftly over the woodwork in an endeavour to find the spring which would release it.

"The Primate, Parker — see to him," he cried.

I ran into the adjoining chamber. The Primate of all England sat bound and gagged in a chair. His alert eyes welcomed me.

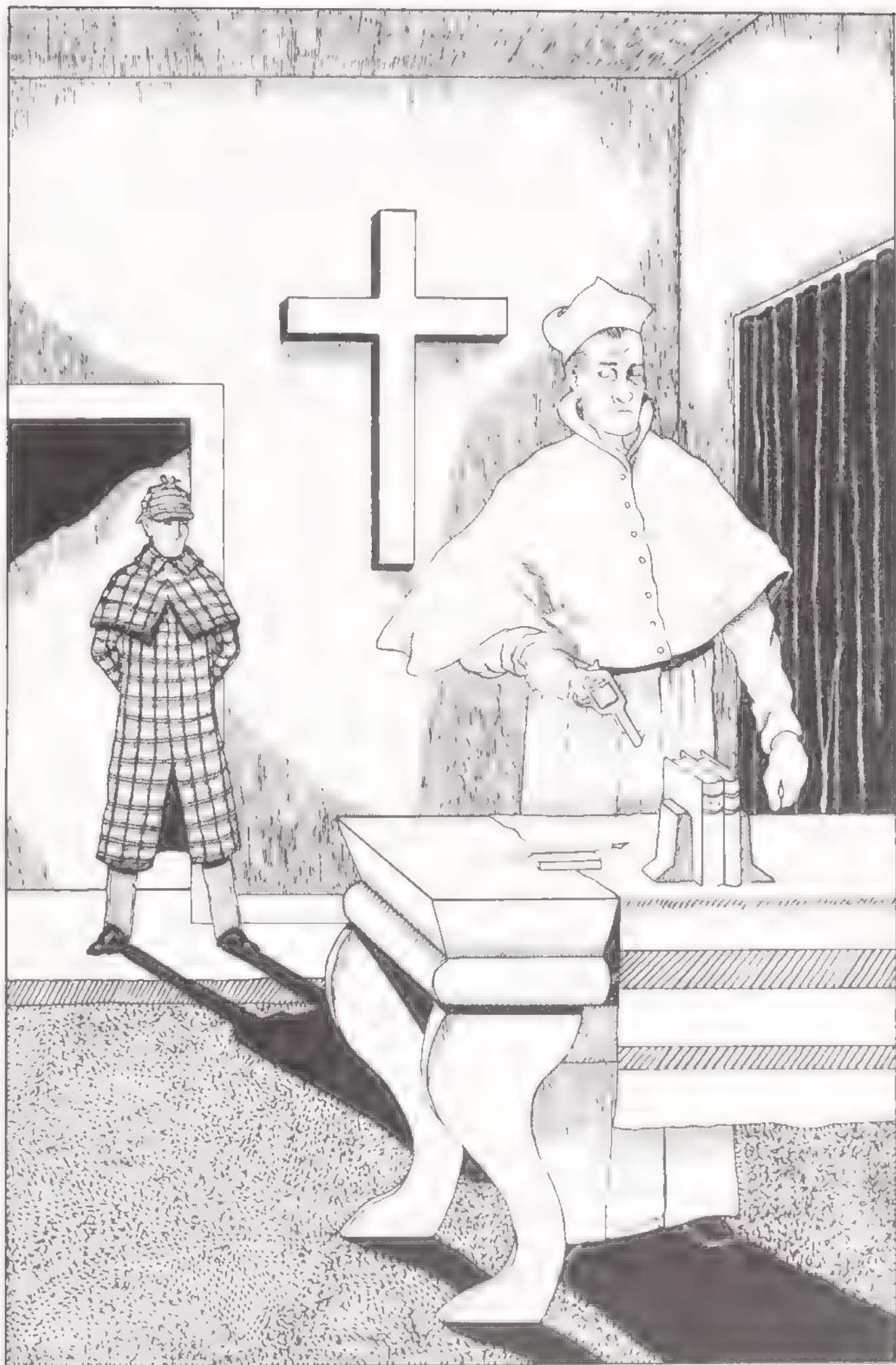
I cut him loose.

"So, it is over," he said quietly. "I heard. I submitted to his indignities for I believed him less harmful here at my side than loose upon the world."

He staggered to his feet and hastened to Pons's side to touch the spring that opened the panel.

He waved us into the opening. "To the cathedral," he said. "Go! I am unharmed."

Pons sprang into the opening — I at his heels. We raced for some distance along a level floor; then we came to a sharp descent which Pons made in three great steps. We found ourselves then in a long



stone passage, at the end of which an ascent of eleven steps brought us to a blank wall. Pons sought and found the spring which opened the wall to us in the same fashion that the Primate had opened the first panel. We found ourselves now behind the high altar of the cathedral.

Without ceremony, Pons rushed around the altar and down the steps to the lower level of the side altars. A few startled worshipers stared at us in amazement. We ran down the long centre aisle and came out through the vestibule to the outer steps of the cathedral.

Pons's wild appearance immediately attracted the attention of a constable who recognized him. "Mr. Pons!" he cried.

"Who are you, Constable?"

"Wilson, sir."

"Has anyone come out within the past few minutes, Wilson?"

"An elderly gentleman, sir. One of the worshipers."

"Tall, thin?"

"Yes, Mr. Pons."

"Wilson, were you not instructed to stop anyone who emerged?" demanded Pons.

"Sir, only clergymen."

"Ah, the glory of Scotland Yard! A pox on Jamison's literal mind! That was our man. Round up your men and notify the River Police. He is making his escape on the Thames." Pons stabbed the dusk with his index finger. "Is that a police car down there, Wilson?"

"Yes, sir."

"We will take it. Notify Inspector Jamison."

Pons leaped down the steps and out into the street, where he commandeered the police car. In moments we were careening up the Avenue and out upon Victoria Street, only to stop at the first telephone booth to catch Pons's eye. There he spent fully ten minutes, while I fidgeted in the car.

When he came back, we drove furiously southward

"Where are we going?" I asked finally.

"To Croydon. I managed to find Bancroft. There will be an armed plane waiting for us. The River Police may be too slow."

"An armed plane!" I cried. "Pons, you don't mean to shoot him?"

Pons smiled grimly. "He cannot be allowed loose on the world Parker."

I need not dwell on that wild ride to Croydon, nor on the gaping

wonder with which we were greeted on our arrival. The armed aeroplane was there, right enough; Bancroft had moved with his customary dispatch. Our pilot was impressed with the importance of his mission, and we were soon zooming away over London along the line of the Thames at a speed that more than made up for the time we had lost in town.

Out of Woolwich, our spotlight found the police boats going at a good rate toward Erith. We swept the line of the river, seeking our quarry on either shore as we went along.

We were almost at Erith before we caught up with the Black Cardinal. We had begun to think he had vanished into the recesses of the docks when suddenly the spotlight passed over a speeding boat on the water below.

"Lower!" cried Pons.

The pilot banked and turned. The spotlight swung in a great arc and again flashed over our quarry as we approached the countryside and the river. Pons leaped to the machine gun.

But as the light caught and held the speeding figure, and the pilot regulated the aeroplane's speed to that of the fleeing figure in the boat below, the Black Cardinal leaped up and away from the boat and was lost in the swirling water.

Boat and aeroplane shot forward; we were out of range of our quarry.

The pilot banked again and turned.

"Worse than futile!" cried Pons. "See there! The green lights of the police boats. Back to Croydon."

We had failed in our desperate gambit.

It was not until noon of the following day that we learned the outcome of the police search. The Black Cardinal had not, after all, made good his escape. His body had been found just prior to Jamison's telephone call, the Thames had quenched his flaming hatred and drowned his grandiose dreams forever.

The Adventure of the Hats of M. Dulac

HIS EYES TWINKLING, Solar Pons lowered the paper as I came into our quarters at 7B Praed Street one morning, and said, "Ah, Parker, this little matter of the honourable members' hats will certainly offer a new topic of conversation to supersede the unfortunate scandal at the Diogenes Club."

"Scandal seldom touches the Club," I said, I fear, somewhat pompously, since the subject of the Diogenes Club was one close to me, the Diogenes having been my earliest affection.

"I refer to the violence done to Colonel Mowbray, who was so outrageously searched within its hallowed precincts," continued Pons, as if to torment me. "Now, I fancy, the honourable members will talk of nothing else but the bedevilment they are suffering in the matter of their hats. The morning papers say that no less than seventeen hats have been stolen from the Club."

"Or mislaid," I said.

Pons shook his head. "Not all seventeen. That would require too much of chance."

"Besides, as I recall it, they haven't all been taken from the Club."

"Quite true. But so far, only members of the Diogenes seem to have suffered the loss of their hats."

"A coincidence."

"Tush! It is nonsense to speak of coincidence of such magnitude."

"Someone's knavery, then, expressing itself in malice against our members," I said.

"It wears the face of desperation, Parker," replied Pons. "It intrigues me. It tickles my fancy. I am almost tempted to propose to the House Committee of the Diogenes that I be retained to look into it."

"Oh, come, Pons—it is too trivial a matter for your special talents," I protested.

"Nothing is too trivial which promises to alleviate for a time the monotony of existence," retorted Pons. "However, at the moment—through the good offices of my brother, Bancroft—we seem to have some sort of problem in the offing."

He reached under the newspaper on the table and tossed a sheet of notepaper over to me. It was expensive paper, of a high rag content—obviously the property of a man of taste and refinement, and perhaps of wealth. I opened it and read:

"Sir: Your esteemed brother has been kind enough to suggest that I call on you about a little matter which troubles me. Perhaps at two o'clock today?"

"HERCULE DULAC"

Below, in Bancroft Pons's unmistakable scrawl, was written: "Solar, more in your line than mine. Bancroft."

"What do you make of it, Parker?" challenged Pons.

" 'A little matter,' he writes," I said without hesitation. "It does not seem to be a capital crime, does it? He is a man of good connections, or else he would hardly have had your brother's ear. Since he has some access to the Foreign Office, and thus to Bancroft, perhaps it is not too much to guess that he is in the diplomatic service. Of France, perhaps?"

Pons smiled. "Splendid, Parker! I am delighted to observe how much of my methods rubs off on you. French, certainly. His name tells us that. The paper is unofficial. The French are punctilious in matters of this kind. Thus M. Dulac's problem is likely to be unofficial. Had it been otherwise, Bancroft would have taken it up. I do not recognize our client's name. He is likely to be a minor official, perhaps in the consular service. He writes with a heavy hand, which suggests that he is not physically slight. And what troubles him would seem to be more in the nature of a puzzle to him than something serious, for the casual air of his note suggests as much.

"But come, sit down and take a little lunch. He will call at a considerate hour, which is not far hence. I trust you found your patient improved and are in good appetite. Mrs. Johnson is even now on the way up the stairs with a delicious steak and kidney pie."

We had hardly finished lunch—indeed, Mrs. Johnson had just left our rooms with the dishes—when the outer bell rang, and our landlady's voice could be heard on the stairs directing our visitor to our door.

"A big man," said Pons, cocking his head to mark the ascending steps.

"Heavy," I said. "Elementary."

"Ah, forgive me, Parker. These little deductions come as naturally to me as food and drink. I forget how they must on occasion tire you."

Our client's knock fell upon the door. I hastened to open it.

Hercule Dulac stood on the threshold. He was not as tall as he was broad shouldered and well muscled, offering the appearance of a man who was much given to athletics. His features, however, were finely cut and delicate, and he wore a moustache to cover a short upper lip. His lower lip was slightly out-thrust. His pale blue eyes swept past me and fixed at once upon Pons. He bowed.

"Mr. Pons?"

"Come in, M. Dulac," Pons called out.

Our client crossed the threshold as Pons introduced me.

"Dr. Parker is my old and valued friend, sir," said Pons, waving M. Dulac to a chair. "Pray be seated," he added. "I am curious to learn of the matter that troubles you."

Once seated, M. Dulac put his walking-stick across his knees and laid his hat upon it. Observing Pons's expectant air, he began to speak at once.

"I hope you won't think my problem too trivial for your good offices, Mr. Pons, but I assure you it has caused me no little annoyance. It concerns, sir, my three hats."

Pons flashed a glance toward me; his eyes danced.

"The cost of the hats is of no consequence," continued M. Dulac. "It is the infernal irritation I suffer and the not inconsiderable mystification. Two hats have been stolen from my house and one was knocked from my head and carried off by a ruffian in the street near my home. Mr. Pons, to the best of my knowledge, I have incurred no enemies since I came to London, and I am at a loss to explain this singular matter."

"When did these thefts take place?" asked Pons.

"My house in St. John's Wood was entered four nights ago. Two nights past, my hat was knocked off in the street."

"You caught sight of your assailant?"

"A big man, Mr. Pons, but very nimble. I took after him, but he outdistanced me without trouble. His face was covered with a silk handkerchief."

"You are in the consular service, M. Dulac?" Pons asked then.

"I am, sir. I am the secretary to M. Flege, the French Consul in London."

"Are you by any chance a member of the Diogenes Club?"

"No, sir. I have exchange cards, of course, which are honoured at several London clubs, but the Diogenes is not one of them."

I coughed.

Pons sat with his eyes closed, undisturbed by my thrust. He pulled his earlobe between the thumb and index finger of his right hand, a familiar gesture which told me that some train of thought had begun behind those keen eyes.

"M. Dulac," he said presently. "I am no lover of coincidence, however much it occurs in life. You are not a member of the Diogenes. You have been a guest there?"

"On one occasion."

"Ah!"

"It is not, however, a Club to which I would have any desire to belong," M. Dulac went on in a disapproving voice. "On the evening I dined there, I had the misfortune to witness a scandalous matter—the search of one of the members by the police. Moreover, on that same evening I found that someone had gone off with my hat."

"I assure you, sir," I could not refrain from breaking in, "such incidents as you describe are by no means everyday occurrences at the Diogenes, which is one of the oldest and most respected clubs in the city."

"Pray overlook Dr. Parker's outburst," said Pons, with a wry smile and mocking eyes. "He speaks as a member."

"Colonel Mowbray," I went on, "is even now consulting his solicitors in regard to an action against the police for that disgraceful episode."

"I mean no disrespect to your institutions, Doctor," M. Dulac hastened to say.

Pons brushed this aside. "Actually, then, M. Dulac, you have lost four hats—not three."

"I haven't recovered the hat lost at the Diogenes Club, no. Mr Pons—but that, I assume—was a simple mistake, for the hat left in its place was quite similar, only somewhat older. The other three, however, were unquestionably stolen."

"The hat you took from the Diogenes in place of your own," pressed Pons. "What has become of it?"

"I still have it, sir. I waited for someone to return my hat, since it had my name and address sewn into the band, like all my hats."

Thus far, no one has done so. I can only conclude that the error has not been noticed. The hat I took from the Diogenes Club is in a box at my home."

"None of your stolen hats has been recovered?"

"Two of them, quite badly torn, were found floating in the Thames, Mr. Pons. A clear case of vandalism, the reason for which completely escapes me. I had thought I had some familiarity with the British character, but the key to this puzzle eludes me."

"What kind of hat was it that you left at the Club?"

"A bowler."

"And the hats which were stolen?"

"Also bowlers."

"Dear me someone has an affinity for our common bowler! Were not the honourable members' stolen hats also bowlers, Parker?" asked Pons.

"I believe they were."

"Perhaps, more than likely, he has a horror of bowlers, since he destroyed two of M. Dulac's," said Pons. So saying, he came to his feet. "M. Dulac, I will look into this matter for you. If you are at home, I will call on you within the hour."

"Sir, I will be there." M. Dulac, too, got to his feet. "The number is 71 St. John's Wood Road, Mr. Pons."

Our client bade us a ceremonious good-afternoon and took his departure.

Pons waited until he heard the outer door close. Then he asked, "Did not M. Dulac's little problem strike you as curious?"

"I confess that the most curious aspect of it is your evident willingness to take up a matter so slight."

"Nothing is slight, my dear Parker. Everything is relative. This matter is sufficiently important to M. Dulac to take him to my brother, and bring him from Bancroft to me."

"He could purchase a lifetime of wearing apparel for what it might cost him to catch the thief who has stolen his three hats," I said.

"Four," said Pons.

"I beg to differ," I insisted. "One was taken by mistake."

"Perhaps," agreed Pons with uncommon amiability. "But let us just examine our client's story for a moment. It suggests nothing to you?"

"Certainly the parallel with what has been happening to the

members' hats at the Diogenes Club begs to be acknowledged," I said. "It would appear that the hat-thief is expanding his activities from club members to guests."

"The sequence of events certainly does suggest as much," agreed Pons. "The news accounts have it that all the hats removed from the Diogenes Club were common black bowlers, not particularly costly. So were M. Dulac's hats. I submit that this is not common thievery, for a thief would already have acquired all the bowlers he could use. Doubtless the psychoanalytic gentry might conceive of the bowler as a symbol, but I daresay the problem is more elementary than that."

"Oh, come, Pons, there is surely no great mystery to be made of this affair," I cried. "You are always the first to chide me when I look away from the obvious."

"Ah, a distinct touch, Parker," said Pons. "You are right. There is no mystery on the surface of this puzzle. A gentleman at the Diogenes Club took someone else's hat and left his own. Before he could return for it, his hat had been taken. For some reason which we must fathom, he cannot openly inquire for his hat—that would seem to be the crux of the matter. He therefore resorts to stealing hats, which he subsequently discards as soon as he finds they are not the missing hat he seeks. He then learns, perhaps after a more complete examination of the hat he took from the Club, that it is the property of M. Dulac, and, reasoning that our client might very well have taken his hat in place of the missing one, he turns his somewhat unwelcome attention to M. Dulac."

"Do you seriously believe that anyone would go to such lengths for a common bowler?" I cried.

"This gentleman evidently *wants* his hat very much," said Pons. "Come along, we'll take a look at it."

Since St. John's Wood Road was not far from our Praed Street quarters, we soon had the missing bowler in our possession. It seemed to me a very ordinary sort of hat, no longer new, but well kept. Our client viewed it with considerable distaste which he took no pains to conceal.

"Lacking any distinguishing mark, it might be hard to distinguish in haste," observed Pons. "So that anyone, coming up behind you, might mistake one of your own for it—and knock it off."

"Yes, that is true, Mr. Pons."

"With your permission, I'll just take this hat along—proposed

Pons. "For the time being, you may not be able to hope for immunity from further thefts—though I daresay anyone invading your house will be interested only in bowlers."

"I am happy to be rid of it, Mr. Pons," our client assured us. "But surely a simple application made at the Diogenes Club might have avoided such a roundabout way and such a distinctly criminal manner."

"Quite true," murmured Pons, peering into the hat, lifting its lining, and fingering it. "The average Englishman would have done so. Fortunately, we are as a nation given to the proper way in which to conduct ourselves—thus it is left to nonconformists like the owner of this bowler to keep up interest in the human animal."

We bade M. Dulac good-day.

On our way back to No. 7B, Pons put the missing bowler into my hands. "Examine it, Parker," he said.

I turned the hat about. It was of good quality, but there was nothing about it to indicate the identity of its owner. It manifestly belonged to a man whose head was a size or two larger than average, but who yet required that some padding be put inside the lining up from the brim.

"A man of middle age," said Pons.

"Ah, yes—I see an iron-grey hair or two," I conceded. "Some dandruff, too."

Pons clucked. "A man who uses cologne."

I sniffed the hat. "Common lilac."

"No, Parker. Expensive lilac. The hat is the costliest of its kind on the British market. Its appearance may deceive you at first glance—costly products often look very ordinary at casual scrutiny. Its owner is obviously a man about town, much given to soft living, a man who appreciates what we tritely refer to as the finer things of life. And thus, in the eyes of such a man, the costliest."

"There is nothing about this hat to warrant its being the object of such an unethical search," I said. "That is surely out of keeping with your description of its owner."

"Ah, that is a *non sequitur*," Pons chided. "A man's morals and ethics are not determined by his tastes. It is sounder to believe that it is the other way round."

"There is one thing," I said. "I refuse to believe that a man of wealth would permit himself to wear a padded hat. He would obtain a perfect fit."

"Capital, Parker!" cried Pons. "I see plainly that when the time

comes for me to retire, you ought to be able to step into my shoes. The hat is not of the slightest interest. Nor, I submit, is it the true object of the search which has annoyed so many more people than our client. It is the padding—not the hat.”

As he spoke, he inserted thumb and forefinger into the lining of the hat and drew forth a long, folded and crumpled envelope. He unfolded it and held it up for me to see. Across its face had been typewritten: “Last Will and Testament of Herbert Comparr, Baron Darnavon.” Below, in a corner of the envelope, in ink, was a date but two months before.

“Lord Darnavon died in a fall down his beach steps three weeks ago or thereabouts,” said Pons. “You may recall the incident, Parker.”

“I do. It happened at his place near Highcliffe.”

“The steps gave way; the old man went down. He broke his neck, as I remember the account.”

“Yes, he was seventy-eight. He had no business on a cliff staircase at that age. But was not his will challenged?”

“I believe it was. He left his estate to his granddaughter, Mrs. Alan Upway, in Australia. She is presumably on her way here though her husband was with Darnavon when the old man died.”

“There was surely no reason to challenge the will?”

“None. It was with a highly reputable firm of solicitors and had been executed only last year.”

“Then this will is the more recent,” I said. “Pons, we should lose no time returning it to the executors of Darnavon’s estates.”

“Gently, Parker,” said Pons. “The appearance of this will gives rise to some interesting questions. I propose to examine them.”

Back in our quarters, Pons proceeded without ceremony to put on a pot of hot water so that he could steam open the envelope found in the lost bowler. I took a jaundiced view of his plan and said as much.

“What you are about, Pons, is precisely as illegal as making off with someone’s hat,” I said.

“Surely it is a matter of degree,” said Pons. “We ought to determine whether the executors of the estate are in fact the proper owners of this document.”

“Are they not the best judges of that?”

“Who am I to say so without knowing what is in the document?”

I said no more, but watched as he carefully steamed open the

envelope and extracted the document within. He read it with obvious eagerness, his keen grey eyes flashing from line to line.

"Mrs. Upway has been reduced to half the estate in this will," he said presently, looking up, "and Darnavon's London nephew, Arthur Comparr, is to receive the other half."

"If those are his only two living heirs," I said, "that would seem a more equitable distribution of the old man's assets. They were considerable, I believe."

"Ample. Darnavon was wealthy. The Crown, of course, will receive a major share, in any case. The granddaughter, however, is in the direct line, and the nephew is not."

"Was there not some bitterness when she left to marry an Australian? I seem to recall something of that kind."

"Some furore in the newspapers, at any event."

I leaned forward. "Pons, doesn't it strike you as more than a coincidence, then, that her husband should have been visiting Darnavon at the time of the old man's death?"

"It is odd that you should say so," replied Pons, his eyes narrowed.

"It would have been to his interest to spirit this will away," I went on, "for by it his wife loses half the estate."

"A logical speculation, Parker, but we have no present connection between young Mr. Alan Upway and the bowler found in the possession of our client."

"I believe such a connection can be disclosed."

"We shall see. In the meantime, what do you make of Darnavon's signature?" He held the final page of the will up to the light before me.

I examined it closely. "It is obviously the signature of an old and probably no longer well man," I said. "It is shaky, unsure—that would be typical of a man of Darnavon's age."

"The witnesses' signatures, in any case, are firm enough," observed Pons. He lowered the will, and sat for a moment with his eyes closed in that attitude of deep thought so usual for him, his face mask-like, with not a muscle moving. He sat thus for fully five minutes before he spoke again to say, "I rather think, on the strength of this little discovery, we ought to pay a visit to Highcliffe."

"Ah, you're planning after all to restore the will to its rightful owners," I cried.

"That, I fancy, is the art of deduction from a medical background," said Pons cryptically.

Next morning found us on a train from Waterloo to Southampton, where Pons engaged a cab to take us to Highcliffe, a small seaside resort, just out of which, along the coast, was the late Lord Darnavon's estate. Pons was annoyingly silent about the reason for his journey, preferring to speak, when he did speak, about the features of the region through which we made our way—the ancient oaks, beeches, and yews of the New Forest, rising among the heathland and farmlands—the Burne-Jones windows in the church at Lyndhurst—the milieu of the original of Alice in Wonderland—the home of the Montagus at Beaulieu—subjects in which, for all Pons's quiet enthusiasm, I was not at the moment primarily interested. Pons said nothing at all to satisfy my curiosity.

It was afternoon by the time we presented ourselves at the seaside home of the late Baron Darnavon and were shown into the presence of Alan Upway, a dark-eyed, reserved, and somewhat suspicious young man, who plainly regarded our visit as an intrusion. He still wore on his arm a mourning band, which I thought somewhat ostentatious and unusual for a grandson-in-law. Yet his attitude toward us could not be described as offensive.

"I am somewhat familiar with your name—and occupation, Mr. Pons," he said. "What can I do for you?"

"Mr. Upway, we have a fancy to walk upon the private beach belonging to the estate," replied Pons. "I thought it only proper that we obtain your permission before venturing to do so."

Upway was astonished—and, I thought, relieved. His face told us as much. He was also puzzled, but no more than I. "By all means, sir," he answered, when his surprise had worn off. "The readiest access is by means of the staircase to the beach-house. My wife's grandfather always used it instead of having steps cut into the steep declivity to the beach. If you care to come with me . . . ?"

Following our host, we made our way down through the gracious gardens and lawns of the Darnavon estate to the hedge which grew thickly at the edge of the cliff upon which the house rose. The hedge was of yew and was interrupted only by a stout gate, opening upon a plain staircase of wood, which led down for some twenty steps to a beach-house built snugly against the cliff on the sand below.

"Here it is, Mr. Pons," said Upway. "You'll forgive me for not coming along, but the place has an unpleasant memory for me. It was here that Lord Darnavon died."

"The staircase, I take it, has been repaired since then?"

"An entirely new staircase was put in. If my wife now elects to take up her residence here, we shall, of course, do away with it altogether, and have steps cut into the wall."

"That is eminently sensible," agreed Pons.

He thanked Upway and led the way down the wooden steps. I followed.

I looked back once, and received a most disagreeable impression of Upway's tousled head, grim mouth, and narrowed, searching eyes looking down at us. But he whisked out of sight even as I gazed upward, and I found it necessary to watch my footing rather than look back again.

Pons waited impatiently at the foot of the steep staircase. "A pronounced risk for an old man," he said reflectively

"A risk even for one younger," I added.

"You speak for yourself, Parker. I found it easy enough. But then, you've grown a little portly—evidence that your success in your practise has gone to your waist, which is always better than to your head."

"What are we doing here?" I demanded. "This is madness. You never so much as mentioned Darnavon's will!"

"I had no intention of doing so. Now, Parker, do me the favour of walking out toward the sea a little and calling to me if you should see young Upway anywhere about above, peering at us."

I walked out past the beach-house toward the sea, which was not far away, for the beach among the rocks was narrow. The Channel rolled gently, making a pleasant water music along the shore, and sea birds flew crying past. Looking back, I saw Pons on his knees at the foot of the steps, scrabbling about in the sand like a child. He was, unless my eyes deceived me, actually sifting the sand through his fingers, carrying it up in his palm, studying it. But my task was to watch the hedge above for sight of Upway.

I sought our host in vain. Having drawn back before my eyes when I was on the staircase, he did not again show himself. The long line of thickly grown yew revealed no sign of a watcher.

I glanced once again at Pons. He had now taken some envelopes from his pocket and was putting into them sand from that in his

palm. What could he have found? It seemed to me that we had come a long way from the matter of M. Dulac's hats.

Pons rose to his feet and beckoned to me. Waiting but to see that I was coming, he began to mount the staircase.

I came along at his heels. He offered not a word of explanation of his puzzling conduct.

We reached the top of the steps and passed through the hedge. Standing with the gate once again closed behind us, Pons looked about. Our host was not to be seen. But across the garden, near to what I took to be a potting shed, an old man was at work cutting back rosebushes.

Pons's long strides carried him quickly to the gardener's side.

"You, there," said Pons. "I'd like a word with you."

The old fellow looked up from under grizzled brows, keen dark eyes flashing from one to the other of us. Then, surprisingly, he smiled. "I be pleased to talk wi' Mr. Solar Pons any time of day," he said. "I reads the papers, I do. Ye've come to make inquiry, I'm bound!"

I was delighted to observe that Pons was too startled to speak.

The gardener's cackled laughter was subdued; his face darkened suddenly. He nodded toward the house and said, "'E told me to burn the staircase. I did burn some after the new one was put in—but not all. No, sir. You come along wi' old Fred Hoskins, Mr Pons."

He turned toward the potting shed, continuing to talk. "Ever since 'e come from down under, the old man had nothing but accidents. There was that potted plant almost fell on him below-stairs. And the upset of the bookshelves in the library. Then the steps—that took him. I saved a piece right 'ere, Mr. Pons."

We had entered the potting shed, where the old man went directly to a row of potted plants. He reached behind them and removed a tread and a small section of staircase frame. He handed these pieces to Pons.

"Broke clean off at the frame on the one side, Mr. Pons. Many time I told the old man it was bound to go some day, but 'e was tight wi' his money. Still, none thought it was that rotten. His Lordship wasn't a heavy man—only medium."

"Thank you, Mr. Hoskins," said Pons, having found his voice at last. I was by this time almost bursting with laughter I dared not release.

"All I wants, sir—all anybody wants, sir—is justice, plain justice," said the gardener fervently.

When we stepped out of the potting shed, Hoskins seemed to shrink together. He fell silent. I gazed past him. There, standing at the back of the house, was Upway, staring fixedly in our direction.

Fortunately, Pons had concealed the portion of the steps the gardener had given him under his coat. He seemed not a whit abashed by our host's intent scrutiny, though we had, after all, straved from the beach. Indeed, Pons passed Hoskins and went directly to Upway.

"I hope, Mr. Upway, you won't think it an imposition," he said, "but I wonder if you would be so good as to answer a question or two about Lord Darnavon's death."

Upway frowned fleetingly and hesitated a little before answering cautiously, "What I had to say about it is on record, Mr. Pons. But I have no objection to answering your questions, if I can."

"Thank you. You were the only member of the family present at the time of his lordship's death?"

"Yes, Mr. Pons." Upway moistened his lips a little and added, "I had been here a week. I had come down from London. I was in London from Australia on business, and I couldn't very well return home without paying a visit to my wife's grandfather. I had written him from Melbourne, of course; so he expected me."

"You were alone with him for a week, then? Apart from the servants?"

"Yes—though there was one afternoon when he sent me away. My wife's cousin was due to spend the afternoon with him. Lord Darnavon expected a bit of unpleasantness because he planned to take Arthur to task for his gambling and debts."

"I see. What precisely did Lord Darnavon say about him, if you can recall?"

"Well, let me think." Upway paused for a moment to cast his thoughts back. "It was something like this," he said calculatingly. "'That fellow spends money like water. Not as if he had it. I talk to him and fume at him and he sulks and mutters and promises he'll reform. Pah! My brother's only child, too! I'll give it to him once and for all.' Something of that nature, Mr. Pons."

"And did he succeed?"

Upway permitted himself a fleeting smile. "I should think not! A day or so after he'd gone, Lord Darnavon missed something of

value and had to take the trouble to lodge a complaint with the police, suspecting that his nephew had taken it."

"What was it, Mr. Upway?"

He shrugged. "Oh, something he could sell for ready money. I fancy."

"Thank you, sir."

"Is that all, Mr. Pons?" His voice was markedly cool.

I broke in. "I wonder, sir, whether you've ever been in the Diogenes Club in London?"

Upway studied me for a moment before he answered, "I was a dinner guest at the Club two days after I landed from Australia."

Pons took me firmly by the arm and bade Upway good-day.

For most of the journey to London, Pons sat in silence, wearing that annoyingly supercilious smile which suggested that he held some knowledge I did not share. I had resolved not to speak, but his attitude so irritated me that, as we neared London, I could contain myself no longer.

"Sometimes I fail to understand you, Pons," I burst forth. "This whole matter is as plain as a pikestaff; yet you've walked away from the culprit as if he would always be at your command."

"That the matter is plain as a pikestaff, I grant," replied Pons, his eyes twinkling. "But I'm not sure we have the same matter in mind."

"The crime!" I cried.

"So far," retorted Pons dryly, "we have evidence only of the theft of three hats belonging to M. Henri Dulac—and, if we can believe the papers, to others belonging to members of the Diogenes Club."

"What about the stolen will?"

"I submit, Parker, that we know nothing of a stolen will."

"Oh, come, Pons," I cried. "You're playing upon words. Are you simply going to sit by and let Upway escape?"

Pons smiled dreamily. "I should think it highly unlikely that he would leave the prize within his grasp, even if he had reason to do so. But, no matter. I shall summon the culprit to our quarters when I'm ready to receive him."

After this, he would say no more.

Back at 7B late that night, Pons pushed aside the supper Mrs. Johnson insisted upon bringing up to us—though I did justice to it—and went to work in his chemical laboratory in the alcove off the living room. He dumped the contents of the envelopes he had filled at Lord Darnavon's beach to the table before him. I saw

plainly that his envelopes contained only sand, pebbles, and bits of wood. He added to all this, the fragment of the fatal staircase. Then he drew over his microscope, and I retreated to the evening papers. From time to time I heard him murmur, but he might not have known that I existed, and he was still deeply immersed in the problem he had set for himself when I went to bed.

Pons was at the breakfast-table when I got up in the morning. He did not appear to have slept at all. He wore a quiet look of satisfaction and greeted me almost gaily.

"Well, Parker, I have turned up one or two little things which somewhat alter the aspect of the matter of M. Dulac's hats," he said.

"Indeed," I replied. "I venture to say your discoveries will come as no great surprise to me."

"Perhaps not. But guesses are never as good as solid facts. What do you make of this?"

He reached down beside his chair and brought up a sheet of cardboard upon which he had affixed several articles. They were, in order: the very end of one of the treads of a staircase—several tiny shavings, which seemed to be fresh; very small grains of wood, likewise fresh. In his other hand Pons held the portion of the staircase frame he had obtained in Lord Darnavon's potting shed, that containing the broken end of the rung.

"If you examine these articles closely," said Pons, "you will observe that the staircase was deliberately weakened by very small, worm-like borings, made at the juncture of frame and rung in such a way as to cause the tread to give way under weight."

"But there is nothing about either the tread or the steps to show that such borings were recent," I objected, after having examined both.

"Quite so. The shavings, however, are a different matter. They are manifestly fresh, and readily lost in the sand. Moreover, there is nothing on their surface to show that they did not come from the new staircase. However, a chemical analysis and a comparison of grain indicates beyond cavil that these fresh shavings came from this staircase and tread. I have subjected the borings to analysis, and I find that a stain simulating aged wood was used to conceal their freshness."

"Very clever," I agreed. "Now let me carry on. Lord Darnavon was sent to his death by this simulated accident. His last will was

then stolen so that his previous will would become valid. Why on earth have you hesitated to send word to Scotland Yard and have them make the arrest?"

"Ah, Parker, you continually amaze me," said Pons good-naturedly, as he rose and crossed to the mantel to fill his pipe with shag from the toe of his slipper stuck into the coal-scuttle. "There is such a little thing as evidence sufficient to convict. The fact that the staircase was tampered with affords us no clue to the identity of the man who weakened it."

"But who stood to benefit by this dastardly murder of a defenceless old man?" I asked hotly.

"His granddaughter, plainly."

"And her husband, who was fortuitously at the scene," I cried. "Need you know more?"

"I think so. We shall see, however. I have sent for the culprit. I dispatched a note early this morning by hand of one of the Praed Street Irregulars. I fancy he will not be long in coming. And, by the way," he added, "I shall take it as a favour if you delayed making your rounds a bit and stood by." He crossed to his desk, from the drawer of which he took his revolver. "Just to be on the safe side, I think you had better keep this in your pocket at the ready."

I stared at him, I fear, mouth agape.

It was not yet ten o'clock when the outer bell rang.

"That may be our man," said Pons. He sat listening to Mrs. Johnson's familiar steps, and then the heavy tread which followed her up the stairs to our quarters.

"It is much too heavy a man for Upway," I said.

"I fear it is," agreed Pons.

Mrs. Johnson threw open the door, and stood aside.

There on the threshold, his hat in his hand, and a broad smile on his ruddy, cheerful face, stood Colonel Arthur Mowbray, my fellow member of the Diogenes Club.

"Mowbray!" I exclaimed, coming to my feet. "You know Solar Pons?"

"I have not had that pleasure," said Mowbray, bowing.

"Ah, Colonel Mowbray, you had my note about your hat?" asked Pons.

"I did, sir. I came directly to recover it."

"Pray come in," urged Pons. "Sit down. Just over there, if you please."

I closed the door behind Mowbray as he went over to sit with his back to the windows.

The Colonel waited expectantly, saying, "Just a common bowler, you might say, but a man grows accustomed to a hat that has well, as one might put it grown accustomed to his head." He laughed heartily.

"Here it is, sir," said Pons, and handed him the bowler he had taken from M. Dulac's home.

"Thank you, Mr. Pons. But how you ever recovered it is beyond me, it is indeed." He stopped talking abruptly, and the expression on his face changed with the suddenness of a summer sky beset by storm.

"I observe you are searching the lining, Colonel," said Pons airily. "I removed the padding."

Mowbray jumped up, allowing the bowler to drop unheeded to the floor and roll to the wall. His fists were clenched; his face worked with rage. He took a step forward.

Pons was unperturbed. "I read it, Colonel," he added coolly.

For a moment I thought that Colonel Mowbray was about to attack Pons. Nervously, I grasped the weapon in my pocket.

"Pray restrain yourself, Colonel," said Pons. "Dr. Parker is armed. I thought that will a lamentably crude attempt at forgery. Not quite your line, is it, Colonel? Gambling, I think, is more to your taste. How much are you in for, Mowbray, to drive you to such desperation?" He gestured over his shoulder toward the alcove. "You may observe a portion of the staircase which collapsed under your late uncle. I have analyzed the borings, the shavings, even the stain you used to simulate age. A clever touch. A pity you resorted to murder. I need hardly say, sir, that Scotland Yard is alert, and these pieces of evidence, together with certain other facts I can impart, will be in the hands of officers at the Yard before the day is out."

"You infernal meddler, sir!" cried Mowbray his great hands working convulsively. He restrained his rage with difficulty and only because I had drawn Pons's revolver and held it trained upon him.

Pons walked across the room and threw open the door. "Good day, Colonel Mowbray."

Mowbray flung himself violently from the room.

Pons closed the door and turned to me. "I fear, Parker, it was a nasty jolt to learn that one of the honourable members of the Diogenes Club could be guilty of murder. But, alas! the distinction

of membership hardly precludes the possibility. 'Mowbray,' as I thought you knew, was an assumed name - to go with the 'Colonel.' Your fellow-member is Arthur Comparr, Lord Darnavon's sporting nephew. It was he who was responsible for the accidents at Darnavon's place, including the one which terminated fatally, as Mowbray had hoped one of his traps - set on the day of his visit - might be. And it was Mowbray who was forced to steal hats to find the bowler he deliberately abandoned at the Diogenes when confronted by the police who were acting on Lord Darnavon's earlier complaint. He could not afford to have the padding in that hat discovered in his possession."

"But the will, Pons!" I cried. "Surely. . . ."

"Ah, yes, the will," Pons broke in. "You made a simple but understandable error, Parker. Had it been Upway who wanted that will out of sight, he would surely have burned it with dispatch upon Darnavon's death. You assumed the will had been stolen and was meant for destruction. On the contrary, it was meant to be discovered later, after Colonel Mowbray had had time to conceal it somewhere at Darnavon's place."

"What was it you told Scotland Yard, Pons?"

"Nothing yet. The evidence is thin - too thin to hope for conviction. Lacking further developments, I will call Inspector Jamison tomorrow. However, Mowbray is a gambler. He may rush forth headlong without pausing to assess the nature of such evidence as I may have - and he is not quite sure of what I can prove. I am taking the chance on Mowbray's gambling instincts."

Pons won his gamble. The morning papers carried the intelligence that Arthur Comparr, generally known as Colonel Mowbray, had shot himself in his quarters during the night.

"Justice," observed Pons, "was what Mr. Hoskins asked. This, I fancy, will do."



The Adventure of the Little Hangman

"MY NATURE abhors a vacuum," said Solar Pons that evening, as he stepped into our room at the inn in Ilfracombe, "and such a holiday as this is indeed nothing less. Happily, unless I am very much mistaken, we shall soon find ourselves once again taking up one of those little problems in human behaviour which never cease to enlist my deepest interest."

"Why do you say so?" I asked, for we had come to Ilfracombe at my insistence to walk some of the most charming coastal paths in all England, because Pons's recent activity in the puzzles of the Lost Metternich and the Hats of M. Dulac had seemed to me to tire him unduly.

Pons chuckled. "I fear I may disappoint you, Parker. I have no great feat of deduction to offer. Only a moment ago, as I came in, I saw a police car stop outside and a plain-clothes officer alight. Perhaps it was only vanity which suggested to me that it was more than mere coincidence that an officer in some haste should be alighting at these quarters just when we are in residence."

He cocked his head and added, "But I think not." Then, as a knock fell upon the door, he called out cheerily, "Come in, sir, come in! Pray don't stand on ceremony."

The door opened smartly. An alert-looking middle-aged man with iron-grey hair did indeed stand with almost military stiffness on our threshold.

"Mr. Solar Pons," he said. "C.I.D. Inspector Ronald Borrow, Combe Martin."

Pons rubbed his hands together in pleasure, his eyes merry. "Pray come in and sit down, Inspector Borrow! A delightfully suggestive name. I am fond of George Borrow; no one has ever written more effectively of wild Wales." He smiled. "But you haven't come to discuss literature."

"No, Mr. Pons. There's been a murder."

"Ah, Inspector, you have no idea how sweetly your words fall upon my ear, after three days spent with the beauties of the North Devon coast. Let us hear about it."

"I telephoned to Scotland Yard, sir. Inspector Jamison told me

you were here. So I came directly in the hope that you might lend us a hand. The murdered man is Kingsley Pollitt."

Pons's eyes sparkled. "The murderer of Helen Blayre! Released last month by order of the Home Secretary on a legal technicality grown from some question about the trial proceedings. 'Miscarriage of justice,' he called it. Pollitt served ten years. I believe."

"Yes, sir. But there was no miscarriage of justice, Mr. Pons. He killed her, no doubt about that. A brute of a man—hot tempered, too. He came to Combe Martin, back to his half-brother's house. John told us at noon today that he hadn't been in last night, but no one was anxious about him. I suppose most of the people in Combe Martin just hoped he'd go away and not come back—he made them uneasy. You can understand that, sir. Well, we didn't organize a search—no reason to do so. Toward sunset this evening, two boys found him. He was lying well up one of the headlands along the coast. You may know it—we call it the Little Hangman. It rises against the Great Hangman, next to the sea. Mr. Pons, he was hanged!"

"Found guilty, condemned to death, reprieved, freed—and finally hanged anyway," murmured Pons. "John, I take it, is the half-brother? He had no objection to Kingsley's return to live with him?"

"I asked him that, Mr. Pons—just after Kingsley came back. He said Kingsley had no one else to go to; he couldn't close his door to him. Besides, John Pollitt is a bookish sort of man. He doesn't go out much, and I'd guess Kingsley's being there wouldn't make much difference to him as long as there was no active interference. But we ought not to take time talking here, Mr. Pons. The body's been left just as it was found. I thought you might like to look at the ground." A little self-consciously he added, "I'm somewhat familiar with your methods, sir."

"My chronicler," said Pons, with a glance in my direction, "has done his best to glorify my little exploits, which are nothing more than the proper use of a well-developed faculty of observation coupled with common-sense deduction—mere exercises in logic. Inspector. Very well, lead on. No doubt you can drive us to the scene."

I made but the semblance of a protest, reminding Pons that he had, after all, come for a holiday.

"The game's afoot, Parker," he replied, "and infinitely preferable to any holiday. Come along!"

On the way to Combe Martin, Pons prodded the Inspector to refresh his memory of the murder of Helen Blayre.

"I wasn't with the plain-clothes branch then, Mr. Pons," said Inspector Borrow. "But I remember it very well. Helen Blayre was an orphan, the ward of her uncle, Tom Plomer. Tom raised her brother Ned, too. She was a pretty sort of girl, not exactly what you'd call beautiful, sir, but not plain, either. Very lively, she was. Why, she was up and about the Little Hangman like a bird, and she knew the coastal paths like anything. She was always to be found out there, with a book or a sheet of drawing paper or both. She was great friends with the Pollitts.

"I think, as a matter of fact, there was a distant relationship by marriage. John never went out too much, even as a younger man, but Helen was about with Kingsley here and there. It was understood they were going to be married—then there was that letter she wrote Kingsley, turning him down. He lost his head and strangled her in a fury. Hadn't meant to do it, but the brute didn't know his own strength. He was just in a rage and took it out on her—blind, you might say. But he was always a selfish man, and thought nought of anybody other."

"As I recall it, that murder took place outside, too, didn't it?"

"On the Little Hangman, yes, sir. Kingsley came on her there after she sent him the letter. They had words. He lost his temper. One thing led to another and he killed her. He ran for it, but not far. We found him drunk at the pub."

"Had she returned his ring?" asked Pons reflectively.

"Oh, it wasn't like that, Mr. Pons. These are simple people. There wasn't any ring, sir. Nothing like that. It was just something you understood. She walked out with Kingsley and she wasn't seen walking out with anybody else. She was his girl, as you might say."

"One would have thought Pollitt would have gone anywhere but Combe Martin, after Dartmoor."

"Yes, sir. But no, back here he came. Surly and moody, as always."

"The girl's uncle and brother? What of them?" asked Pons.

"Both still alive, Mr. Pons. Tom's about sixty now, Ned's close to forty." In the light from a passing car, the Inspector looked troubled, as if he anticipated an unpleasant task. "We'll have to talk to them, I have no doubt."

"All in good time, Inspector."

In but a little while—for the distance was scarcely half a dozen

miles—we had reached Combe Martin and were on our way along the path that led to the slope of the Little Hangman, which rose up for over seven hundred feet east of the village. A waxing moon lay low in the west, and over against the eastern sky, towering higher than our destination, loomed the Great Hangman, dark on heaven. Inspector Borrow's torch lit the path, and Pons strode along with far more vigour than he had shown during our casual holiday hikes on the coast from Ilfracombe, his Inverness spreading almost bat-like in the light wind blowing from the direction of the Bristol Channel.

Partway up the slope, a constable stood with a lantern on guard lest unauthorized persons venture there. A second stood virtually on the crown of the height, his lantern shining like an intimate star toward which we toiled up the gradual slope away from the last houses and fields of the combe. As we came toward our goal, the constable on duty there turned his light earthward.

There in a pool of luminescence lay the body of Kingsley Pollitt. The dead man lay on his back, arms flung wide, his sightless eyes turned toward the stars. He was once, clearly, a thickset, powerful man, of medium height to shortness of stature, but he had lost much of his onetime weight and his clothing fitted him poorly. He was fully dressed, except for a tie; his open shirt revealed the mark of the rope which had hanged him. At least two days' growth of beard was visible, even against the discoloration of his face, which I knew was a deep blue, though in this artificial light it looked sickeningly grey, so that Pollitt had the appearance of a mulatto.

The tableau held but a moment. Then Pons reached for Inspector Borrow's torch.

"If you please, Inspector. Thank you."

He swept the light around in a wide circle, and up and down the slope.

"A singular lack," he murmured. "From what was he hanged? There is no tree within the range of the light."

"No, Mr. Pons. We observed that. We can only conjecture that he was hanged elsewhere."

"And brought here. Then there would be signs."

He began to search the ground, earnestly. He threw off his Inverness and got down upon his knees, moving around the body in steadily widening circles for a while, then crawling back down the way we had come. He went for some distance down the slope before

he came to his feet and returned to where we waited

"Something has been dragged toward this spot," he said, "and I submit it could not have been other than the body. There are barrow marks further down, some fresh, some older. Perhaps ancient lead and silver-mining in the Combe Martin area is occasionally emulated by modern treasure seekers, eh, Inspector?"

"It might happen, Mr. Pons, though I'd consider it unlikely."

"So then, if Pollitt were hanged elsewhere, there is not only premeditation but also some special significance in his body being brought to the Little Hangman."

"Mr. Pons, his crime. . . ."

"Precisely. He murdered in the sight of heaven; so let him die there. But we have no evidence that he did die here, only that he was brought here. Have a look at him, will you, Parker?"

I examined the dead man as well as I could by the combined light of the torches. Everything I saw was consistent with death by hanging. There was, however, a contusion on the back of his head, to which I called Pons's attention.

"Could it have been made in the course of transporting his body to this place?" asked Pons.

"It was made before death."

Pons smiled. "Stunned, then hanged. Most interesting. The goal was hanging, not death by any other means, for the man who stunned him could have dispatched him in any way he chose. He elected this imaginative if cumbersome method, as if to carry out the justice Pollitt escaped. Ah, what have we here?"

As he spoke, he darted forward, seized hold of what appeared to be a smooth twig projecting from beneath the body, and pulled it forth. From his fingers dangled a carved miniature gibbet.

"This little problem grows more fascinating with each moment," said Pons. "What do you make of this, Inspector?"

Inspector Borrow's face was lugubrious. "I'm afraid, Mr. Pons, that it puts yet another light on the matter."

"We are meant to believe, plainly, that Pollitt got what was coming to him. The motive for his death would appear to be vengeance—or simply justice, in the mind of his murderer."

"There's more than that, Mr. Pons," said the Inspector. "You may remember Mr. Hernshaw, the executioner?"

"That short, cherubic little man who was so disappointed at not being able to hang Pollitt!"

"Yes, Mr. Pons. He was unwise enough to say so for the newspapers, and he retired soon afterward. You see, Mr. Pons, Mr. Hernshaw, too, is from the vicinity. He now lives in Combe Martin, where he does a little business, I am bound to say, selling wood-carvings."

Pons could not repress a chuckle. "A travesty, Inspector, a travesty! A hill and a man—we now have two little hangmen and a hanged man. And three named men among probably a score or more who would not be sorry to see Kingsley Pollitt dead, and might have helped him shuffle off this mortal coil!"

He turned the full light of the torch upon the carving in his hand. It was done with broad, powerful strokes of the knife. It had a certain malignancy, a powerful suggestiveness, as no doubt it was intended to have. It was carved out of some soft wood, the identity of which was not immediately apparent.

"A professional wood-carver, our Mr. Hernshaw?" murmured Pons. "But this is not the work of a professional, on the face of it."

"Unless it was meant to look unlike the work of one," I offered.

Pons agreed. "That is a point I fear we dare not overlook."

He returned to the body and fell to scrutinizing the earth anew. For a while he crouched there in puzzled concentration. Then he rose and came back to where we stood.

"Several people have walked here," he said. "Perhaps the hanging of Kingsley Pollitt was in the nature of a community effort. One set of tracks seems to be that of a short, heavy man, walking with a rolling gait."

"That would be Hernshaw," said Inspector Borrow.

Pons nodded thoughtfully. "I take it," he went on crisply, "you examined Pollitt's pockets?"

"Yes, Mr. Pons. There was nothing of significance. Some matches, four shillings, sixpence, a packet of cigarettes, and a newspaper cutting on which he had marked two prospective jobs. It would seem that he had intended to find a job in Bristol, for both were offered there."

Pons stood for a moment looking thoughtfully down at the body. Then he turned away, saying, "I daresay we've finished here."

"Will you stay the night in Combe Martin, Mr. Pons?" asked Borrow.

"I think not. Let us just have a look at the items found in his pocket—and, if possible, a glance at the dossier on Helen Blavre's

murder. Then we'll return to Ilfracombe and come back here in the morning."

Though the hour was midnight when we reached our quarters in Ilfracombe, Pons was far from ready for bed. He had brought with him from Combe Martin the newspaper cutting found in Pollitt's pocket, and a copy of the letter Helen Blayre had written Pollitt shortly before he had strangled her. He sat for some time beside the lamp, studying both of these things, his keen grey eyes veiled, his lean, hawk-like face deep in thought.

The extract from a Bristol paper could not be construed otherwise than it was. It was barely large enough to contain the four advertisements among which Pollitt had marked two, with the numerals "1" and "2," suggesting the order in which he meant to apply for a job. The first notice which he had marked called for building workers, and the second offered a place in an ironmonger's shop.

I protested at his long scrutiny. "It's plain to be seen that there's nothing but what meets the eye in that."

"I fancy you're right, Parker," he agreed amiably. "Yet I find a trifle of significance about it. It suggests nothing to you?"

"No, except that Pollitt meant to remove himself from Combe Martin."

"Precisely. For a month nothing happened to him in Combe Martin. Then, just as he was about to put himself quite possibly beyond his murderer's reach by going to Bristol, he was killed. I submit this suggests that his murderer had planned to kill him from the time of his first appearance in Combe Martin, and was only biding his time. Pollitt's intention to leave forced him to act." He dropped the clipping and turned to the letter. "What do you make of this?"

The letter poor Helen Blayre had written was simplicity itself

"DEAR KINGSLEY,

"I know I can never marry you, and it would be dishonest to pretend otherwise. The way of life you offer me is not the same as the one we have planned. You were good to ask me, but, I am sorry, it cannot be. I wanted to write you this to spare us both next time we meet, so there wouldn't be any misunderstanding. We have always got along so well, I would not want

this to spoil that. Let us forget that you ever spoke to me and go on as always.

"In affectionate friendship—
"HELEN."

"That is plain as a pikestaff," I said.

"I'm glad to hear you say so," replied Pons. "There are one or two little points about it that intrigue me, however. It doesn't seem to you curiously worded?"

"Oh, come, Pons," I cried, "it's nothing more than what it's meant to be. It tells us that Pollitt proposed a way of life which did not appeal to her as the ideal marriage; so she rejected him. The letter is absolutely straightforward, but I suppose it would hurt the vanity of a low type of human being like Pollitt. Obviously, they had planned something other than what he now suggested, and she couldn't agree with the change he proposed to make in their plans."

"It is always refreshing to listen to you, Parker. You have a reliable factor for reducing matters to their simplest common denominator."

"What can you find in that innocuous letter in conflict with what I've said?" I challenged him.

"I submit there are various openings. For instance, Miss Blayre wrote: 'it would be dishonest to pretend' that she could marry Kingsley. But, if we're to believe Inspector Borrow, did she not do so for some time before she wrote this letter? Secondly, what is this 'way of life' that is now so different from the 'one we have planned'? Note, please, she writes 'have,' not 'had.' A minor point, true, but I cannot help calling it to your attention. Next, she proposes that both of them 'forget' that Kingsley asked him to marry her, and 'go on as always.' Now, then, how did they 'go on' before? I find that question provocative."

"Ah, Pons, you are so given to finding hidden meanings in everything that simplicity confounds you," I said.

Pons chuckled delightedly. "On the contrary, I agree wholeheartedly with you, Parker. This is a simple, straightforward missive. I am always astounded to discover how the simplest communications can be misunderstood and misinterpreted. Is that not perhaps, symptomatic of some basic flaw in mankind? Semantic confusion abounds in this world." He put the letter down and turned out the light. "Let us sleep on it. We may have a clearer view in the morning."

Pons routed me out at dawn and, after a hasty breakfast, insisted upon walking to Combe Martin. Thus it was almost two hours after dawn when we reached the village. Once there, Pons went immediately to the little police station and returned the effects he had studied the previous night. Inspector Borrow was at the station, and with him we set out to call on John Pollitt, for Pons had expressed a wish to look at the rooms the victim had occupied.

Combe Martin by daylight seemed somewhat drab but it was hardly uninteresting. It lay in a long cluster of houses, many of them very old, which ran for over a mile along the combe to the beach. At one time it had been a wealthy town, as a result of the silver and lead which had been mined there, but the height of the mining was more than a century in the past, and what had once been grandeur had now faded. Though the surrounding country was beautiful enough, only a few objects of interest remained in the village to tempt the traveler, such as the eight-chimneyed Pack of Cards Inn, built on a cruciform plan, and the Standing Stone on Knap Down, northeast of the village. Its chief architectural beauty, however, was the church of St. Peter ad Vincula, which stood proudly with its hundred foot high west tower, flying buttresses, battlements, two tiers of gargoyles, and crocketed pinnacles, which Pons admired as we went by.

The Pollitt house stood on the edge of the village, near the beach. It was a very old, white-walled building with an ancient roof. Like so many Combe Martin houses, it was of three floors, and its ground floor was partly sunk into the earth. And John Pollitt, for all that he resembled a fading headmaster in a girls' school, had the undeniable appearance of belonging to the house.

He was a genteel, soft-voiced fellow, wearing a thin beard, and his rooms were crowded with books of all descriptions, occupying not only the tall shelves but scattered on chairs, tables, and even the floor. His pale blue eyes looked out apologetically from behind his spectacles, studying Pons with polite interest as Inspector Borrow introduced him.

"Mr. Pons wants to ask a few questions, Mr. Pollitt," said the Inspector. "Just the usual inquiry."

"Of course. I understand."

Pons lost no time. "How soon after he was set free did your half brother come here to live, Mr. Pollitt?"

"I believe he came straight on."

"You interposed no objection?"

Pollitt hesitated slightly. "He had nowhere else to go, sir," he said then. "After all, I'm his brother. I couldn't turn him out."

"You knew how people felt about him?"

"Yes, I knew. Still—" he shrugged—"there's enough of man's inhumanity to man without my adding my bit."

"He never showed any fear of his fellow villagers?"

"None, sir. He was a strong man. Prison hadn't improved his temper."

"I should like to take a look at his quarters, if I may."

"Certainly, Mr. Pons. Come this way."

Pollitt ascended to the first floor and into one large room, beautiful with the age of its whitewashed walls and raftered ceiling.

"Nothing has been disturbed here. It's just as he left it," said Pollitt.

Pons stood for a few moments in the middle of the room, looking at the cot which had served Kingsley Pollitt as his last bed; at the table, where, presumably, he took his meals; at the two chairs, which were certainly a century or two old, and the product of some one's unskilled hand.

"How old is this building, Mr. Pollitt?" asked Pons.

"I believe it dates to the time of Edward I."

"It is certainly well preserved. Are those the original beams?"

"Yes, sir."

Pons pulled up a chair and mounted it to scrutinize the rafters. "Remarkable," he murmured. "How this wood endures! And the room is not at all damp."

"No, sir. The walls are at least a foot thick, Mr. Pons. We keep it dry."

" 'We'?"

"Forgive me. I do not customarily live alone. I have a handyman who lives with me—George Potter—but I had to let him go because he can't—couldn't—abide Kingsley. I suppose now he'll be back."

Pons turned once again to the beams. After he had looked at several of them, he gave his attention to the remainder of the room, examining the floor with exceptional care on his hands and knees. But there was singularly little to see. The room was in good order—doubtless Kingsley Pollitt had learned how to keep his quarters tidy in prison. One chair stood at an angle a little way from the table as if it had been pushed back in haste and not replaced when last Kingsley had got up.

"Tell me, Mr. Pollitt, had your brother any intimation that

someone still bore him a murderous grudge?" asked Pons, getting up from his knees.

"He told me one night he had had a warning to leave Combe Martin. It was unsigned. He destroyed it, but felt it had come from one of Helen's relatives."

"It came by post?"

"No, it was pushed into his hand when he walked out of one of the local pubs."

"One of Miss Blayre's relatives, eh? He did not mention which one?"

"No, Mr. Pons."

"Very well, I shall want to talk with them. Thank you, Mr. Pollitt."

Outside, Pons stood briefly looking toward the headlands. In the morning sunlight the Great and Little Hangman looked anything but sinister, the former somewhat formidable, but the latter only a pleasant upland slope rising to a rounded ridge, higher back from the coast, the peak ridge dominating the lower. The headlands stood like barriers to the sea, which added a salty tang to the morning air.

Inspector Borrow waited patiently until Pons turned away. Then he set out in a rapid trot back the way we had come, out from the inland edge of Combe Martin, ourselves at his heels, until we came to a modest country house which stood before an extensive farm, separated from the road by a high hedge.

"They'll both be here," explained Borrow. "You can talk to both at once, or to each separately, as you wish."

"It makes no difference," said Pons.

As it happened, the older man, Tom Plomer, responded to Borrow's pull at the bell. He was a dour, grim-faced man, bald except for a fringe of greying hair around his head just above his ears. He was clean-shaven. Sharp black eyes darted from one to another of us before he spoke.

"Mr. Borrow," he said in a flat, and, I thought, wary, voice. Then, instead of inviting us in, he stepped outside. "Ye've come, I'll be bound, about Kingsley Pollitt."

"We have, Mr. Plomer. This is Mr. Solar Pons, who is making some inquiries for the police."

Plomer nodded curtly. "If ye expect to know where I was night before last, I'll tell ye now, I was abroad."

"Witnesses, Mr. Plomer?" asked Borrow.

"I believe they can be found," answered the older man gravely.

"Mr. Plomer," said Pons, "had you seen or spoken to Kingsley Pollitt between the time he came home and the night he met his death?"

"I saw him, yes," said Plomer grimly. "As for speaking to 'im, I'd as lief speak to the devil. Ye needn't be asking me any more questions. I'll tell ye now I won't lift a finger to harm the man who did him in. He had it coming—and more. If I'd got my hands on 'im. . . ."

He was quiet abruptly, as a younger man came hurrying around the corner of the house, his hot brown eyes angry, his dark-skinned face flushed with irritation.

"Here, here, what's all this?" he cried. Then, catching sight of the Inspector, he added in a calmer tone, "Oh, it's you, Borrow."

"Don't say anything, Ted," cautioned Plomer.

"I've got nothing to hide," answered Ted Blayre.

"And where were you the night before last?" asked Borrow.

"Out with a lady. And don't be asking me to name her, for I'll not drag her into this. I know what you're aiming at, Borrow, but it won't wash. I came face to face but the once with Kingsley Pollitt. . . ."

"At a pub, Mr. Blayre?" asked Pons quietly.

"Yes, it was there—as he was coming out and I was going in. Had he not been coming out, I'd not have gone in. It wouldn't do for the likes of both of us to be together in peace under one roof. If ever a man deserved to die, it was Kingsley Pollitt. I'm hoping you never find out who did it, for the whole village is glad he's done for—the whole village. Not a soul in it but didn't love Helen—nor hate him for what he did."

"Ye talk too much," warned the older man sharply.

"I know what I'm about," answered Blayre curtly. "There's not a man in all Combe Martin who'd give testimony to say he saw anyone wheeling a body in a barrow, and if he saw it plain as day, knowing it held Kingsley Pollitt's body."

"No one has said a barrow was used, Mr. Blayre," said Pons.

"True. But it takes only a small bit of brain to see that. If it's true, as they say, he was hanged where there was no tree, then it's by barrow he'd have been wheeled up the hill. It don't take Mr. Solar Pons down from London to work that out."

"Quite so. Elementary," agreed Pons pleasantly. "Perhaps you'll be good enough to tell us how you got that mud on your shoes. It seems unlike these surroundings, and not at all unlike that to be

found on the path up the Little Hangman."

Blayre looked down quickly, a fleeting expression of alarm in his eyes. Then he glanced up again, defiantly. "There's mud of that sort all around Combe Martin," he said scornfully.

"Why don't ye go back to London?" cried Plomer angrily. "We don't need no meddling busybody coming here to pry about."

"Easy now, Mr. Plomer," said Borrow. "Mr. Pons is here at our request. We can ask you down to the station and put you through it, if need be. We'll have the answer to some questions straight now, if you please." He turned to Pons. "Go right ahead, Mr. Pons."

"There's just a trifling matter I want to inquire about," said Pons. "I'll have a look at your barrow."

Without a flicker of emotion, Ted Blayre turned and led the way across the yard and around the house to a small shed. He threw open the door. There stood the barrow, freshly washed, as clean as new.

"Commendably tidy," said Pons dryly.

"We like to keep things clean," said Blayre.

"Now, then — what else?" asked Plomer defiantly.

"Nothing else, gentlemen," said Pons. "I bid you good-day."

As we walked away from the Plomer house, Borrow said apologetically, "Just you say the word, Mr. Pons, and we'll have them down at the station."

"No, no, Inspector — I learned all I expected to learn," answered Pons enigmatically.

"Either one could have killed him," I said. "But I'll take her brother before her uncle."

"If they meant to kill him, why wait a month?" asked Pons.

"Opportunity," I added.

"A fortuitous opportunity indeed, on the eve of his departure for Bristol." He smiled. "However, let us not neglect Mr. Hernshaw — I have a fancy to speak with him."

The retired hangman likewise lived on the edge of the village, in an old two storey stone house. We found him outside among his bees, a rotund, pink-cheeked little man. At sight of us, he came hastening eagerly forward, taking off his veil, a broad smile on his face, his bird-like eyes fixed on Pons to the exclusion of Borrow and myself.

"It's a real pleasure to meet Mr. Solar Pons," he said without preamble. "I knew you, sir, the moment I caught sight of you — I used to read and hear about you while I lived in London. And there

were occasions, sir, I believe, when I finished – as you might say what you put in train.” He chuckled. “I never thought I’d have the opportunity to meet you. Especially in these circumstances” – here he favoured us with an elfin smile – “when it may seem impossible to find a solution to this crime – if it can be called that. Now, then, what can I do for you?”

“I understand you carve in wood, Mr. Hernshaw?” said Pons.

“I do, indeed, sir. I do. May I offer you a carving?”

“Let me purchase something of my choice. Do you have a gibbet in wood, by any chance?”

“Quite in my line, as you may say, sir. Of course.”

“I’ll take one then, presently. Similar to that found near Kingsley Pollitt’s body.”

Not an eyelash quivered at this pointed remark of Pons’s. “Whatever you like, Mr. Pons,” said Hernshaw, again with that smile, which was now not so much elfin as sly, as if he were laughing at us but did not dare do so openly.

“I seem to recall, Mr. Hernshaw,” Pons continued, “that your unwise comment about Kingsley Pollitt cost you your position.”

“It certainly contributed to it.” Hernshaw nodded, still smiling engagingly. “I would dearly have loved to hang him, Mr. Pons. Not alone that he merited it, but he had a thick neck – a bull neck. I believe it is called in some quarters. He represented a challenge to a man of my skill, sir, a genuine challenge. I was very disappointed when the reprieve came through. Very disappointed. I fair cried, I did. And I spoke my piece – and that was what started the trouble for me. I found it best to resign in the face of all the to do brought about by those tender-hearted idiots who are so soft on capital punishment. Why, Mr. Pons, there was a time I’d as soon have hanged a sociologist as a murderer. I was that put out.” He looked at us all archly, and laughed.

“You saw Pollitt since he came back?”

“Quite often. They’ll tell you – that is, if you’ll find anyone to testify,” he added, with a satisfied conviction that we would not, “that I followed him about – keeping my distance, of course, for he was mortal strong – more than once. I used to speculate how I’d have done it – though his neck’d shrunk a bit in Dartmoor. All of him had.”

The smile never left his face, and he looked from one to another of us as if expecting open approbation.

“It’s the sort of thing that gets into your blood, Mr. Pons, and that’s a fact. You take pride in a good job well done. And in all the

years I served in my capacity. I never bungled an execution. Nice, clean jobs. That's as it should be. They have a right to expect it."

"Like Kingsley Pollitt," I put in.

"Ah, was he now? I've not seen the body. But I'm happy to hear it." He gazed at me intently. "You'll be Dr. Parker, won't you? Then you must have seen the body. Tell me, was his neck broken cleanly? Ah, I see by the expression on your face that he was more likely strangled. Not a good drop, then." He clucked in disapproval and shook his head with an expression of prim distaste.

I thought it an extraordinary conversation, and ventured a glance at Pons. I saw that his eyes positively danced with pleasure, and that he had difficulty keeping a smile from his thin lips.

"Bad as he was, Pollitt deserved a clean hanging," added Hernshaw soberly.

"Since you followed him about, perhaps you can tell us how he spent his time?" asked Pons.

"As he usually did, Mr. Pons—off by himself on solitary walks, or half drunk in the pubs. There was no work he could do. His brother sometimes found an odd job for him, but it was never for very long, nor meant to be. No one wanted him. Helen Blayre stood between him and whatever he tried to do. We're a closely knit community, sir. We've been here for hundreds of years. We've no tolerance of murderers. It was strange he came back here—but then, he was always hardened to what others thought of him."

"Was there anyone who liked him?" asked Pons gently.

"Helen Blayre did," said Hernshaw. "And his brother. He never gave another the chance to like him. Always a surly fellow. But you don't need me to tell you that. Ask anyone—anyone at all."

"Did you see him the night he was killed, Mr. Hernshaw?"

"No, Mr. Pons, I did not. Strange, too, for I was abroad that night until quite late. You might even find my footprints on the path up the Little Hangman near to where he was found. It's a pity no one hereabouts has the knack with his hands I have—that carving you say you found would be crude compared to my work." He smiled again, that same sly, if winning smile. "But come with me. I'll show you my work."

After half an hour of looking at Hernshaw's skilled carvings, we took our leave, Pons with a beautifully made gibbet in his pocket. There was no resemblance whatsoever between this piece and that other found under Kingsley Pollitt's body, and I said so as soon as we were out of earshot.

Pons chuckled. "That means only that this one could not have

been done by someone else, but that the other might have been done by Hernshaw. I fancy it was. A good carver can carve crudely, if he's a mind to, but a bad one cannot carve well, no matter how much he desires to do so," he retorted.

"A sly, devious man," I said. "Sinister, too."

"Say not so," answered Pons. "I found him delightful, with a flavour seldom encountered in our cities. Country people seem to remain individualists longer than those unhappy souls confined in closer quarters."

"I'm afraid we've not had much help," said Borrow, disappointed.

"Do not be disheartened, Inspector. I did not really expect to be assisted very much. As a matter of fact, I was reasonably sure of the identity of the murderer before I went to sleep last night."

"Mr. Pons, you are joking!" protested Inspector Borrow

"Thanks to your own assistance, Inspector," continued Pons. "I daresay there is a problem to be faced when it comes to trial, for the temper of the village is such that no one will want to testify, though there must have been someone who saw the barrow with its burden being wheeled up the Little Hangman, no matter how late the hour might have been. By the way, I should lose no time impounding Plomer's barrow and subjecting it to the most careful scientific examination. I should not be surprised to learn that it had been used to transport the body—just as I am reasonably sure that it was Hernshaw who pushed that little wooden gibbet beneath the body."

"I'm gratified if I was of any assistance, Mr. Pons—but I don't understand how."

"Come along, Inspector," said Pons. "We'll go to the station where we left the evidence."

Inspector Borrow flashed me a mystified glance, but I could only shrug, knowing my companion's unorthodox methods.

At the small police station, Pons asked once again for the copy of Helen Blayre's letter.

"Read it, Mr. Borrow," he directed.

Borrow did so. His eyes, when he raised them, were unenlightened.

"It suggests nothing to you?"

"Nothing, sir."

"Dear me!" exclaimed Pons. "Yet it is perfectly clear. Consider the second sentence, for example. 'The way of life you offer me is

not the same as the one we have planned.' What does it mean to you?"

"Kingsley Pollitt made some change in their plans."

"I submit, Mr. Borrow, that your conclusion is as much in error as the conclusion of those who read this letter before you. Pray note, she writes 'we *have* planned' not 'we *had* planned,' which would have been proper in the circumstances you accept. You have all made a readily understandable error in concluding that the pronoun 'we' referred to Helen Blayre and Kingsley Pollitt. I suggest it did not. I submit that it referred to someone else."

"But then to whom, Mr. Pons?"

"Why, to the one man with whom she had everything in common except her penchant for hiking. Pray reflect she is reported repeatedly to have gone out into the hills and fields carrying books. And books are John Pollitt's life. People concluded, erroneously, that because she was seen with Kingsley Pollitt they were 'walking out' together, when, in fact, she walked with Kingsley only because his brother was sedentary. She never pretended otherwise, because it was with John, not with Kingsley Pollitt, that she had an understanding."

"Mr. Borrow, John Pollitt performed what for him was an act of justice when, anxious lest his brother escape to Bristol, he stunned and hanged him from a beam in Kingsley's own rooms. You will find the marks of the rope there still, if you hurry. I saw them plainly. I saw also strands from the rope on the stone floor below the beam. In essence, it comes back to this—Pollitt was shunned by everyone and who else but John knew of his brother's determination to go to Bristol to work? Kingsley's body was taken to the Little Hangman not only to remove it from his lodgings, but because it was there that he had killed Helen Blayre."

"Justice failed John Pollitt, Inspector—but he did not fail justice. I wish you good luck in your attempt to bring him to trial, but I am not sanguine, in the face of the temper of the people."

Pons's foresight proved correct, for the verdict against John Pollitt was not guilty, and he was set free. A fortnight after the trial, Pons received from Hernshaw a skillfully carved effigy of a hanged man, "to complete your little gibbet," as Hernshaw wrote. Its features bore a remarkable resemblance to those of the late Kingsley Pollitt.

The Adventure of the Man with the Broken Face

EARLY ONE EVENING in mid-September, on my return from an obstetrical case, I found my friend, Solar Pons, waiting upon the door with a pronounced air of expectation.

"I fancy we shall soon have a visitor, Parker," he said, "and I trust you are not too tired, for, unless I am much mistaken, we have before us a trip into the country."

"A client?"

"I believe so. For the past hour a young lady has been trying to make up her mind to call. Twice she has actually stopped her trap before the house, and once even got out of it with the evident intention of mounting to our lodgings. Each time she has gone away. On a third occasion she drove slowly past, eyeing these windows with considerable speculation. She paused at the corner and went into the post-office there; since she carried nothing out with her and was gone for some time, I fancy that she was at the telephone, and, unless I err grievously, she was putting through a trunk call. No doubt it was she who telephoned early this afternoon and asked whether I would be at home this evening."

"Who is she?"

"She failed to give her name. Nevertheless, from what I have seen of her, she is obviously a young lady close to thirty years of age, of genteel breeding, to whom the making of decisions is rather new and comes with patent difficulty. She is somewhat nervous, and at this time much agitated. Clearly, something has taken place for which she cannot account; she does not want to go to the police, but she does not really want to take anyone at all into her confidence; yet she appears to have no alternative, for here she comes once again. And yes, this time I fancy she has made up her mind. She has stopped; she is getting out; there is a marked air of determination about her. . . . Now then!"

He turned from the windows, rubbing his hands together in expectation, and gazed, as was his habit, toward the bell, which, quite as if it were a living entity in a little drama and had been given its cue by Pons's glance, rang immediately. And, in a very little while, Mrs. Johnson had shown into the room a young woman

whose appearance did indeed suggest many of the descriptive facets Pons had voiced.

She was in her late twenties, and clearly a spirited young woman, though at the moment in manifest distress. Her hair was worn long, and it was ash-blonde in colour; she had good reason to shun the use of cosmetics, for her colour was good, her cheeks and lips naturally red, and her blue eyes strong and direct, with heavy dark lashes. She was dressed for riding, in rather masculine apparel which did not however for an instant conceal her femininity. She had no difficulty choosing between us, and identified Pons without hesitation.

"Please forgive this delay, Mr. Pons. I telephoned you this afternoon. I am Sylvia Norton."

"Pray sit down, Miss Norton. Clearly, the problem which impelled you to come to me has not in any way improved since you reached London, as you hoped it might have done when you telephoned home a little while ago."

Miss Norton smiled. "I am sure that even my father could not have taken exception to my seeking your assistance, Mr. Pons."

"Ah, so your father is missing, Miss Norton. I seem to think your features familiar. Are you, by any chance, the daughter of Captain Hyatt Norton?"

"I am."

Hyatt Norton was known as one of the minor heroes of Britain for his courage in attempting to save a valuable cargo of diamonds when the ship of which he was the skipper, went down in a storm off the Cape of Good Hope three years before. He had, indeed, brought back to Britain a part of that cargo, at great risk to his life, the sole survivor of his crew, managing after almost incredible hardships to make his way back to his native country after a period of being marooned on an island where he had had time to repair his damaged boat. He had retired to his home somewhere on the coast of Essex, and had sought only to live down the public acclaim which had followed his homecoming with one of the chests of diamonds.

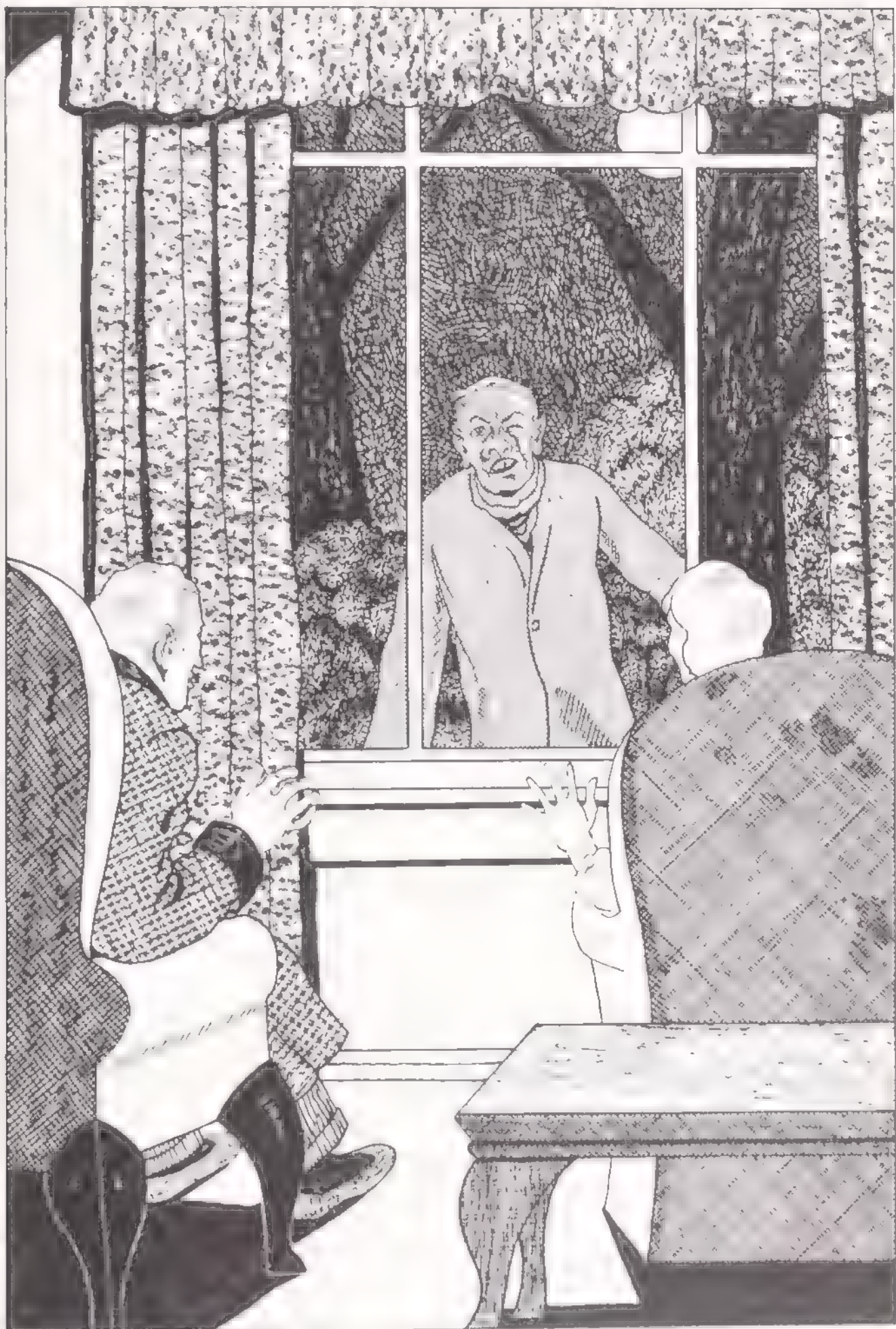
"Perhaps you had better tell us your story as you see fit, Miss Norton. Obviously, it does not begin with your father's disappearance, for something must have taken place prior to that, since you suggest you talked over calling someone in."

"Yes, that is right, Mr. Pons. It begins four days ago, to be exact. As you know, we live between Maldon and Tollesbury on the coast

of Essex; our house is modest, two storeys in height, but somewhat rambling. It is set round with trees, except for a small garden in the rear. My father, my aunt my mother's sister and I live there alone. We had a servant at one time, but had to let him go, for he was surly and ill-tempered; since that time we have managed very well by ourselves. We have always lived a quiet life. My father never liked the publicity which attended his homecoming three years ago. He has always been a genuine country type, and seemed to be happy walking, gardening, or occasionally shooting. He did not read very much, though we subscribe to *The Times*, and he read this faithfully, now and then writing letters for its columns. Our existence there has been uneventful, save for a single instance, which I regret to say was caused by my father's objection to my fiancé, an objection to which naturally I paid no attention.

"On the fourth of this month, I could not help noticing that my father was preoccupied and restless ever since receiving the morning post. I guessed that he had had a letter disturbing him, but he had received only two letters, and both were obviously from tradesmen, one in London, and the other in Maldon. He ate very little that day, and by nightfall he was nervous to such a degree that he put us all a little on edge. My aunt went to bed quite early, as is her custom, but my father and I stayed up. We both sat in the study, which is a long, low, and very pleasant room facing the sea, he at the table, and I beside the fireplace, reading.

"I think it must have been about mid-evening when I was aware, with that intuition most women have, of something wrong, perhaps it was the absolute stillness of my father that made me look up. But I did look up, I looked over at him, and Mr. Pons, I saw my father staring at the windows with an expression of such abject terror on his face, so startling and fearful an expression that I could not even yield to impulse and cry out, his eyes seemed to be starting from his head, his mouth was agape, and his forehead was beaded with perspiration; at the same time his hands were clenched white upon the table before him. I forced myself to look cautiously over the back of the chair, and so I too had a glimpse of that horrible thing my father had seen. It was—or perhaps I had better say I think it was a man's face, but Mr. Pons, what a face! It was a ghastly travesty of a face; it looked like only part of a face—I would describe it as a *broken face*, for part of it seemed broken in. It was horrible, and if it had not vanished, I do not know what would have happened to me. But it did; it seemed to dissolve even as I looked at it. Then I found my voice and called to my father.



"To my surprise, he said only that he was not feeling well; apparently he had eaten something which did not agree with him. He said not a word about that horrible face at the window, with the result that I did not mention it, either. I thought this most peculiar, but I felt that in good time he would speak what was on his mind.

"But he did not. I saw that he was not himself in the morning. I had heard him up and about during the night. I myself finally broached the subject to him, and suggested that if something were wrong, it might not be amiss to report the matter to the police. He was surprisingly gruff.

" 'Nothing's wrong,' he said shortly. 'And let me hear nothing further of the police—they are worse than inefficient.'

" 'A private investigation, then,' I said.

" 'Nonsense. You are growing into a hysterical young woman.'

"That was all he said. Nothing further happened that day, and on the following day, that is, yesterday, the sixth, I was hostess to a little garden party for some of the ladies from Tollesbury. As a result, I was very tired last night, and so was my aunt; both of us went to bed early. I left my father in the study, reading *The Times*.

"Mr. Pons, that was the last occasion I saw him.

"When I came into the study this morning, I found the light still burning, and the paper open, just as my father had left it. Across the room, one of the French windows stood partly ajar. I went over and closed it, for the September morning air is not warm. Then I folded the paper and turned out the light, thinking at first that my father had forgotten to return to the study, though he had not done such a thing before. About quarter of an hour later, it occurred to me that my father was not likely to be so remiss, and I became alarmed; I went to his room and discovered that his bed had not been slept in. I then began a systematic examination of his clothes, to discover if possible whether or not any of his clothing was missing. Nothing was gone, nothing but what he had been wearing when last I had seen him—that is, his trousers, bedroom slippers, a white shirt, and a smoking-jacket. And, I suppose, his underclothing.

"I hesitated to take any immediate action, but by noon, both my aunt and I were convinced that something had happened to my father. This was made all the more pointed when we discovered that someone had pulled open drawers of my father's study table during the night, and, though nothing seemed to have been taken, still, it could not have been done by my father, for he would not have left such disorder. Shortly after this discovery, I telephoned

you. I waited then for some time, lest my father return; when he did not, I came to London. Even then I hesitated, knowing his antipathy to my course; but, after telephoning my aunt, and ascertaining that he had not yet returned, I hesitated no longer."

Pons sat for a few moments in contemplative silence. "This face you saw," he said presently, "impressed you as being broken. Could you elucidate that, Miss Norton?"

"I don't know, Mr. Pons. It was just—well, horribly smashed. As I remember it, it looked as if one side of his face had been just well, caved in, and never attended to; it was something like that."

"Its effect on your father was fully as frightening as it was on you. Yet he made no mention of it. How do you interpret that?"

"Knowing him, I should say it was because he did not want to frighten me; he did not know I had seen it."

"I see. What do you expect of me?"

"I want you to find him, Mr. Pons. If possible, I want you to come with me now and solve this horrible mystery—find my father and solve the riddle of that terrible broken face."

Pons gazed at her thoughtfully. "Very well, Miss Norton. Your problem intrigues me, though I cannot make promises. Let us just lose no time getting to the scene, for, unless I am very much mistaken, your visitor may return."

"Oh, I hope not!"

"I have a fancy to encounter him," said Pons.

It was well past mid-evening when we arrived at the house on the coast road above Maldon, and, since the night was dark, save for a few stars and a sickle moon low in the western heavens, it was not possible to see much of the place. Miss Norton's aunt, an austere woman with a forbidding countenance, welcomed us; she wore black hair drawn back from a parting in the middle to be knotted behind her head, and gold-rimmed spectacles; she had been waiting up for us. Miss Norton put her horse and trap away, and came around into the house from the opposite side; she had introduced us to her aunt, and the older woman, now that her niece was once again at home, withdrew, leaving us to be taken to the study at Pons's request.

"You may leave us now, if you like, Miss Norton," said Pons.

"I have a duty to perform, Mr. Pons. I have brought you gentlemen all the way from London without dinner. At least let me make you some tea."

"Ah, that will be welcome indeed."

When she had left the room, I turned to Pons eagerly and asked, "What do you make of it?"

Pons did not look up from his task of examining the table and chair where Norton had been sitting when last seen. He shook his head grimly and muttered, "Dark waters, Parker; dark waters."

I was nettled at this ambiguous reply. "But surely there are some aspects of it which present no problem to you?" I cried.

"There is no aspect of the problem which gives me cause for second thought, unless it is the present whereabouts of Hyatt Norton; and I believe I could make a good guess at that, too. No, there is not much opportunity given us for speculation, Parker."

"You know all, then?"

"Not quite all," said Pons modestly. "Surely it is obvious, Parker?"

"I confess that nothing at all is obvious."

"Very well then. Let us re-examine the matter as Miss Norton related it to us. Let us take the man with the broken face. It is certainly not to be doubted that Norton knew who it was looking into his study, for if he had not known, why then his hesitation to confide in his daughter? I fear the theory that he might frighten her does not hold water. Accepting that, then, we must also accept the fact that Norton had good reason for not confiding in his daughter or in anyone, and he had the same reason for not calling in the police."

"Presumably then, the man with the broken face meant him no harm."

"That is a *non sequitur*, Parker. Think again."

"I don't follow you."

"If he meant Norton harm, there was clearly greater harm threatening from another direction. So much we can safely assume. Now, Miss Norton said that the French doors were ajar. Very well. Norton opened them. The September night was chill; he did not open the doors for fresh air. He opened them for a visitor. Let us just step outside and see what evidence we can find."

He suited his actions to his words, and I followed him. Immediately beyond a flagstone terrace there, Pons turned his flash upon a narrow path between two flower beds, where footprints were clearly manifest. He read these footprints with a facility that was beyond my own slowness.

"Ah! Our fellow with the broken face limps. He has a leg injury

then. Or no, I retract that, Parker. He has a wooden foot or leg—see, the difference between the prints is clear and unmistakable in its implications: this foot has not bent; the other has.”

“There are other footprints,” I pointed out.

“Norton’s,” answered Pons shortly. “He walked away with him. Let us assume they had something to talk about, and Norton wished to talk out of hearing of the house.”

“You suggest that Norton let the fellow in?”

“Or went out to him. It is all the same. He left the study willingly. Afterward, the other fellow came back alone. What does that suggest to you?”

“Foul play.”

“Apart from sounding like a cinema melodrama, I daresay you are right.”

We returned to the study, where Pons’s keen eyes soon lighted upon a number of copies of *The Times*, neatly stacked on a half-filled bookshelf. These he took over to the table, and commenced to look through them, while he continued to speculate about the problem.

“As for the nocturnal visitor who so badly frightened the Nortons,” he said, “what does his description suggest to your medical mind?”

“The victim of an accident.”

“Ah, yes, but in what circumstances?”

“Presumably in a place removed from proper care. I submit he did not have the medical attention necessary to prevent the malformation of his facial wounds.”

“Capital, Parker! You improve with time and experience. I commend that fact to you for further study.”

At this moment, Miss Norton returned to the study with tea and sandwiches she had made, profusely apologizing again for having so thoughtlessly deprived us of our evening meal. We fell to without delay, Pons, however, carrying on an oblique conversation about Norton’s ill-fated ship, which was the *Monsoon*, a small, privately owned merchant vessel not usually carrying such valuable cargo as she had carried on her last trip. She had foundered and caught fire during a storm off the African coast, and the small crew had taken to the boats. Norton and two of the men had gone last, Norton carrying with him two small chests containing the diamond shipment. One of the men had died on the second day, and the other three days later, during a squall, Norton had lost one of the chests.

He had clung to the other for dear life and, after being cast upon an island, where he had time to repair his boat, he had set out for England, faithfully discharging as much of his duty as possible by delivering the partial shipment of diamonds to its consignee. So he had been acclaimed as one of England's heroes of the sea.

It was an old story to both of us, but Pons listened with unfeigned interest to Miss Norton's telling of it, asking questions from time to time, and generally putting our charming hostess at her ease, despite her natural concern for her father's welfare. I sat pondering Pons's cryptic charge, but could not find it possible to pursue that trend of thought beyond the boundaries I had already achieved, and these were, manifestly, such as any medical man would naturally reach.

After Miss Norton removed the remains of the meal, Pons turned again to *The Times*, and, after glancing through an issue, tossed it, with a smile of satisfaction, to me. "Now, then, Parker, exercise your ingenuity."

I saw that the paper was the edition of September fourth. "You assume that because Norton was not agitated by letters, he saw something in *The Times* that troubled him?"

"Surely that is obvious?"

I went through *The Times* with care, and found nothing significant.

Pons was impatient. "There is one item which ought to be of interest to a retired seaman."

"Oh, that!" I cried. I read it aloud, having found it again. " 'James Smith, seaman, was released from the National Sailor's Hospital yesterday after treatment for exposure and malnutrition. Mr. Smith, the victim of an accident at sea, and suffering from amnesia, was rescued from a raft near Dakar last month.' "

"I submit it was that which agitated Norton."

"I make nothing of it."

" 'James Smith' is surely as good as no name at all."

"The man is admittedly an amnesiac," I protested.

"I do not recall that the account speaks of his amnesia as in the present tense. He was suffering from amnesia at the time he was picked up. He would not be released if he were still an amnesiac. Or would he?"

"No, of course not."

"Very well then, I submit that James Smith is very probably not his name. He is described as a 'seaman.' Now that is ambiguous, to

say the very least. If a seaman and the victim of an accident at sea, why is his ship not named? It is not too much to assume that the failure to do so lies in the twin facts that Mr. Smith cannot remember, and that James Smith cannot be identified by any registry. Assuming then, that our Mr. Smith is no longer an amnesiac, he must surely have had a very good reason for clinging to his common name and for making full use of his previous amnesia. In short, it is not too much to suppose that it was not desired by Mr. Smith that his ship be made known. I put it to you that Norton's reading of that paragraph was fully as cognizant as mine."

"But it fails to hang together."

"Does it, indeed? I wonder."

"Your inference is plain—but I fail to see any kind of motive."

"Suppose you start over, Parker, and take nothing for granted. You may quite possibly have a different light on the matter."

On this note we retired for the night.

In the morning Pons roused me before the rest of the household was up. He led the way back to the study and out through the French windows, where he picked up the trail of the two men and followed it until it was lost in the lawn beyond the flower-beds, then discovered it again leading in the direction of the seacoast, and continued to follow it until it was once again lost. However, it was plain that the route taken by the two men was north along the coast in the direction of Tollesbury. The coast at this point, which was not far above the river Blackwater estuary, was singularly broken, and, as he went along, Pons scrutinized the shore sharply, often weaving in and out from the coastline, until he came to a point of high ground about half a mile from Norton's house; there he paused and examined the ground with close attention.

The clear evidence of some kind of struggle showed there. The edge of the cliff had been broken away, and it appeared that a heavy object had gone over into the sea.

"I fancy this is where Norton met his end," said Pons grimly.

"Dead?"

"I think no other alternative presents itself."

"But for what motive?"

"That should not be difficult to arrive at."

"If he went in here, then surely we'll not find him. The sea will have taken him."

"Not necessarily. The chance is equally good that his body is lodged somewhere among the rocks along the coast here. Let us just look carefully about."

So saying, he took from his pocket a small pair of binoculars and, lying down on the ground, began to examine the sea's edge. I looked around and decided that the man with the broken face, if indeed it were he who had brought Norton to this spot, had chosen the site well; for it was lonely, and little traveled; the gulls screamed here without interruption, and shore birds nested under the overhanging cliff. If any outcry had sounded, surely no human ear but that of the murderer had heard it.

An exclamation from Pons interrupted my reverie. "Look there!" said he, handing me the glasses and indicating a rocky cove some distance up the coast. "I daresay that is our quarry."

"It certainly appears to be a body," I agreed.

"Come."

Nor was Pons mistaken, for there, when we came to the rocks in that cove, was the body of the late Captain Hyatt Norton; the tide had doubtless wedged it where we found it. It was that of a portly gentleman of well past middle age; he was grizzled and square-jawed, with a white moustache and iron-grey hair, and his dress fitted Miss Norton's description of that worn by her father when last seen.

"Your department, I think, Parker."

"Bruise on the head," I said. "Possible fracture. Not fatal."

"Drowned, then?"

"In all probability. Pushed off the cliff while unconscious."

"Evidence of murder?"

"Difficult."

Pons took his place beside the body. "His shirt has been opened." He drew away the shirt as he spoke. Norton's trousers, too, had slipped down a little, exposing a portion of his waist. Pons's action disclosed a slightly discoloured band of flesh which apparently ran around Norton's body. "Ah, what do you make of that, Parker?"

"A belt mark, I should say."

"But he is plainly wearing his belt, which is much narrower than this band. What he wore there was surely worn next to his skin."

"Certainly."

"That suggests one of those belts in which one carries valuables, eh? What do you say, Parker?"

"I agree."

"So, then, it is gone. The fellow got it. Yet he did not get everything he sought, or he would not have returned to the house."

"Elementary," I said.

"And unless I am in grievous error, he is still skulking in the vicinity and will pay another visit to the property. We must plan to be there. But for the present, we shall have to convey news of this melancholy discovery to Miss Norton and her aunt, and, if possible, to prevail upon them to have the body removed to Maldon, with themselves in attendance."

The final act of this curious drama took place in the Norton house that evening. Both Miss Norton and her aunt had yielded to Pons's importunings that they spend the night in Maldon, which was neither too far away nor too close to the house. Pons assumed that the murderer of Captain Norton was in hiding somewhere along the coast, but not far from the house; certainly he might be expected to be ensconced somewhere close enough to enable him to keep the Norton home under surveillance from time to time.

I confessed that I could not follow Pons. Miss Norton, despite her grief at news of her father's death, had steadfastly submitted to questions, and had divulged the fact that her father kept a modest account in the Maldon bank; she had no knowledge of anything of value kept in the house itself, apart from certain antiques which had more intrinsic than actual value. Nor were there any papers, to the best of her knowledge, which could be of any worth to anyone apart from members of the family. She could not explain what thing of value in the house might attract the attention of a burglar, for the ladies, as well as the constabulary, had been given the suggestion by Pons that Captain Norton had chased a burglar and had met his death in some manner along the coast. He had been extremely careful, I observed in some perplexity, to avoid any direct suggestion of murder.

No sooner were the ladies gone, however, than Pons was in the late Captain Norton's bedroom. "This, it would seem to me, is the proper hiding-place for anything of value Norton might have "

"All the evidence is that he wore his valuables in his money-belt."

"Presumptive evidence, only. His murderer came back to the house, remember. At least *he* has reason to think there is something more. So let us begin."

Almost the first thing we discovered was a loaded revolver

"So our friend, the late Captain, was not entirely unprepared," observed Pons. "He kept his weapon ready and in good condition."

"A not necessarily indicative precaution."

"In the light of events, most significant. Yet he did not have it with him when the end came."

"Apparently not."

Pons went on searching, going through the bed, the bureau, even examining the chairs and taking up the rug in the hope of finding some receptacle in the floor. But there was nothing; there was nothing in floor, furniture, or walls.

"What the devil are you looking for?" I asked finally, in some exasperation.

"Treasure," answered Pons without a smile.

"Treasure, indeed!" I protested. "If we had some idea of what to look for. . . ."

"Well, be patient, Parker. It is not money; it may be gold, silver, jewels. Let us persevere."

He sat down on the late Captain's bed and looked soberly around him. We had examined everything in the room with one exception: that was a large, framed print of a merchant ship which was apparently that of the *Monsoon*, and it was upon this that Pons's eye lighted at last, at first in speculation, and then with a gleaming light of calculation. Abruptly he sprang up, strode across the room, and took down the picture.

"If it is here at all, it is in this."

He turned it over, and disclosed that the back of the picture was unlike that of any other picture we had ever seen. It was not only tacked shut, but also taped quite heavily. Pons gave the back of the picture a sharp blow, and then shook it; a faint rattling was his only answer.

"Now, then," said Pons. "Let us just take this with us."

We retired to the study, where Pons carefully deposited the picture on one of the bookshelves, setting it upright, so that it might readily be seen by anyone entering the room from outside.

It was now that last hour of dusk in which darkness comes upon the country, and already the study was murky with twilight. I would have lit the lamp, but Pons stopped me.

"No light, Parker. Let him assume that the house has been deserted." He took from his pocket the late Captain Norton's revolver and thrust it at me. "I suggest you take this. I'll arm myself with the fireplace poker."

"Am I to use it?"

"Since our man has already killed once, he will in all probability not hesitate to do so again. If it becomes necessary, fire. Now, then,

dispose yourself. I suggest you take that seat beside the hearth. I will sit opposite you in the farther corner, facing the French windows."

"You expect him to come in at that point?"

"That is the familiar entrance for him. And so far, he has not gone beyond the study. So he will in all likelihood enter by the windows to continue his search where he left off the other night."

It was after midnight before there was any sound to reward our patience. Then it was a startling one—the blow of some hard object against a window, and the tinkling breaking of glass. I felt, even if I could not see, a hand reaching in through the broken pane to unlock the French doors. The doors opened and closed; then there was that infinitesimal sound of footsteps moving carefully across the floor. I turned my head slowly in an effort to look in the direction of the sound.

At that moment a match was struck, and I got a full view of a hideous travesty of a human face—of ghastly, broken features incredibly pitiful and terrible at once—before the fellow's hand came up and shielded his eyes from the little flame. He walked across to the desk, unaware of Pons or me, and calmly lit the lamp there, certain that no one occupied the house at the moment, and sure that no one passing on the coast road would become suspicious at sight of lamplight in the house.

No sooner had the light gone up, I was sure, than he would see Pons. But not so; what he saw instead was that picture of the *Monsoon* Pons had cleverly put up where anyone standing where the intruder now stood would be certain to see it. With an oath, the man with the broken face darted around the desk, seized the picture, and turned.

Thus he saw Pons.

"Stand where you are," said Pons.

But he had already observed that Pons was armed only with a poker; dropping his find, he whipped out a knife, bent his arm back, and let fly. Alarmed at Pons's danger, and sickened anew at sight of the fury mounting in that bestial travesty of a human face, I lost my head and fired twice.

I heard Pons's exclamation of dismay, for he had parried the knife with the poker easily enough; then, simultaneously, he and I sprang toward him just as the man with the broken face toppled forward with a little moan.

Pons caught him and lowered him to the rug, whipping out his handkerchief to staunch his wound, which was, I saw at a glance, close to being mortal. One bullet had apparently failed to hit the destined target, but had instead passed through the picture of the *Monsoon*, with a result as startling as it was unexpected, for through the rent in the picture had come a stream of rough, uncut stones that gleamed and shone in the light of the lamp!

"Lend a hand, Parker," cried Pons. "We may save him."

I was brought to earth instantly by Pons's irritated commands, and came to my knees beside the man with the broken face. I tore open his shirt and carried on from where Pons had left off, for Pons was now engaged in encouraging the victim of my shot to speak.

"Come, man—you may be dying. Your name?"

"Farway—Herbert Farway."

"Of the ship *Monsoon*, sailing under Norton with a cargo of diamonds?"

"Aye, ve know it, then. Ye know 'im for what 'e was—as black a scoundrel as ever sailed the seas! 'E's done for now, and I'm glad I did it. I'd do it again—and again—and again for what 'e done to me."

He was breathing somewhat easier now, and was in no immediate danger of lapsing into unconsciousness. Watching me, he was reassured by my attitude, and he began to talk, rapidly—as if he must tell everything before he died.

And the story he told was as horrible as his tortured features, a tale of deceit and murder, of theft and hypocrisy. For the late Captain Hyatt Norton, far from being a hero of the sea, was exactly the opposite. His ship had gone down much as he had told of it; but he had departed from truth thereafter. He and his two companions, of whom Farway was one, had arrived safely enough on an island off the coast of Africa, and had set about to repair the boat. Moreover, both little trunks of diamonds were with them, and safe; neither had fallen into the sea. When they were ready to set forth again, Norton had set upon his companions, killed the other, and left Farway for dead, horribly beaten. But Farway had not died, he had been discovered by a party of blacks from the mainland, blown off their course by a gale, taken off the island into the African forests, and brought back to a semblance of health. He had finally set out from that country in one of the blacks' canoes, but this had been damaged beyond repair, and he had set to work to build a raft.

from which he was rescued. It had taken three years to get back to England, and he lost no time thereafter in finding out where Norton lived, hoping he still lived so that he could avenge himself, for he knew Norton meant to take part of the diamonds. And so he had; he had come in along the coast in the night, hidden one of the little cases of diamonds, and then made a show of loyalty and duty by delivering the other and all those years taking the acclaim of his country as a hero and living safely on his gains, while marketing his diamonds in Ostend and Amsterdam by boat directly across the Channel. So much he had learned from Norton on that fatal walk, when Norton, hoping to rid himself of Farway, had offered him part of those ill-gotten diamonds, and rebelled when Farway wanted them all. It was Farway who was that James Smith whose discharge from that London hospital had filled Captain Hyatt Norton with that intuitive uneasiness which heralded the long-delayed payment for his crime, for, though he had believed in Farway's death, he had never been certain, and Farway's appearance that first night, with his horribly broken face the plain evidence of Norton's homicidal attack, had with every reason frightened and terrified him. And Farway had got the diamonds in Norton's belt, and some of his money, too. The rest of the stones lay there gleaming in the light beside the dying man.

There was nothing more to be said. Farway died within an hour; nothing could be done to save him, and he seemed to have lost the will to live.

"Dark waters," murmured Pons again. "And they must remain undisturbed—for the sake of that poor girl, Norton's daughter. We shall manage to restore the diamonds to their rightful owners and persuade them and the insurance company to keep silent without telling the true details of the matter. A burglar shot—Captain Norton's accidental fall from the shore to the rocks below—Yes, I fancy that interpretation will do as well as any. Surely nothing can be gained by bringing any more misery into Miss Norton's life."

The Adventure of the Benin Bronze

WHEN I ENTERED the quarters I shared with my friend Solar Pons at 7B, Praed Street one wild autumn evening late in our first decade together, I found my companion standing at the mantel with an opened letter in one hand. He had evidently just come in himself, for his deerstalker had been carelessly dropped on the table, and his Inverness was still on his shoulders.

"Ah, Parker," he said, without looking up, "the exuberance of your gait suggests the successful conclusion of another case."

"You may say so," I replied. "Old Jabez Black has taken a marked turn for the better. I have seen him through the worst."

Pons turned from the mantel, slipping off his Inverness. "We have the offer of a promising problem," he said, handing me the letter he had been reading.

The letter was a folded double-sheet of linen paper with a single embossed line at the top, announcing Mrs. Aaron Morley. Below yesterday's date, written in a manifestly hasty script, was:

"DEAR MR. PONS,

"Unless I hear from you I hope to call on you at eight o'clock tomorrow evening. Uncle Randall will do nothing—he treats the matter as a joke, but my intuition tells me it is not. No such frog is native to England, and that cannot be denied. Forgive me. I am frightened.

"MIRIAM MORLEY."

I looked up. "If that isn't just like a woman! It is all a scatter."

"But intriguing, is it not?" said Pons, his eyes dancing. "And I fancy it is perfectly plain to our client. Something menaces her uncle and, however incredible it may sound, a frog not native to England has something to do with it. That is surely simple enough. What do you make of the scent?"

I had been conscious of the not unpleasant fragrance that rose from the notepaper. "Perfumed," I said.

"I submit it is rather a pungency than a perfume," said Pons

I raised the letter to my nostrils. "Yes, you are right," I agreed. "It is the aroma of bayberry."

"Is it not a curious scent for a woman's stationery?"

"Women frequently have very odd tastes in these matters," I said.

"I defer to your judgment," said Pons.

"I see she has given you no chance to refuse her an appointment. There is no return address."

"Posted at Basingstoke late yesterday," said Pons. "She is scarcely an hour away by train or car, and perhaps she can afford the loss of a couple of hours should she fail to find us here. It is now close upon the hour and I fancy we will presently hear of the problem that besets her."

"She has written this in some agitation," I said, surrendering the letter to Pons at last, "and in haste."

"Ah, that is elementary," said Pons, smiling. "You will also have noticed the slanting of the script peculiar to left-handed people as well as those trivial affectations — such as the circular dot above the *z* — common to younger writers. Even her agitation was not great enough to permit their omission."

"I believe I hear a car at the kerb," I said.

Pons stood listening.

The outer door opened below. In a few seconds a woman's light step sounded on the stairs. Within moments a gentle tap at the door brought me across the room to throw it open, revealing our client.

Mrs. Aaron Morley was a woman of perhaps thirty — a sharp-featured blonde whose vivid blue eyes at once fixed upon Pons, the sight of whom brought a tremulous smile to her thin but beautifully shaped lips. Her skin was fair, and the clothing she wore was costly.

"Pray come in, Mrs. Morley," invited Pons.

"Thank you, Mr. Pons."

"That is Dr. Parker at the door," he went on. "We have been intrigued by your message and were waiting on your arrival."

I sprang forward to pull out a chair for her. She thanked me and settled gratefully into it, drawing off her gloves, and beginning without preamble to speak. It was immediately evident that such composure as she had was false, for she launched into her account at a point clearly several removes from its proper beginning.

"I have tried and tried to tell Uncle Randall Creighton that he must ask help," she said, "but he's so stubborn, Mr. Pons — why, the very mention of your name threw him into a rage, and he will not hear of the police. Of course, the servants are at the Hall — but the

house is so surrounded by shrubbery and trees that anyone could hide there for some time without being discovered. He will not see how dangerous it is."

"Forgive me," interrupted Pons. "Surely it would be best to begin at the beginning."

She stopped short, blushing, took a deep breath, and said, "I suppose it would. But I can't be sure when it began, unless it was with the post one day last July, when my uncle received a letter with a drawing in it. Nothing else."

"What kind of drawing?" asked Pons.

"I have tried to make a sketch of it. He destroyed it, after studying it for a while and showing it to us; but I remembered it."

From her handbag she took a folded paper—another piece of her stationery, I saw—and flattened it on the table before Pons. I could see it as clearly as he. It looked like a design of some kind. Across the top of the paper there were three globular objects, like dew-drops; these crowned what was clearly the drawing of a human eye enclosed in lashless eyelids; and below this representation there was a small *V* of perfectly executed little circles.

Pons looked at it in silence for a long minute. Then he gazed at our client. "He said nothing of this?"

"Not to me. Not to Aaron. I overheard him mutter just one word. It was 'Benin.' "

Pons's eyebrows rose. "Ah, he was in Africa?"

"He was in military service there just thirty years ago. He took part in some battle or other which was hideously bloody. Indeed, Mr. Pons, he was so affected by it that for many years he fancied he could smell the blood, and ever since he has burned incense. . . ."

"Bayberry," said Pons dryly.

"Yes, that is it. Everything in the house reeks of it—though I have tried with little success to get the reek out of our quarters. Uncle Randall burned it, of course, to take that other smell away. But there was no other smell—Laburnum, perhaps, rhododendron in season—nothing more."

"Proceed with your story, Mrs. Morley."

"I suppose he received other drawings like this—I saw some of the envelopes; they were like the first one, without a return on them, written in what appeared to be a very strong hand, but with a foreign appearance—"

"Postmark?" put in Pons.

"London. Of course, I couldn't be sure—he showed me nothing,

just destroyed them as they came. Then, sometime in August, we began to hear the frog. I was in the study with Uncle Randall one night when we heard it the first time. I didn't know what it was, of course. He did. He named it right away—some kind of hairy frog not native to England."

"*Trichobatrachus robustus*?" ventured Pons.

"Yes, that's it, Mr. Pons—that's what he called it."

"Did he seem alarmed at the cry?"

"No. More puzzled and surprised. Later on, though, I thought him distinctly uneasy. We kept on hearing the call."

"Every night?"

She shook her head. "Only now and then."

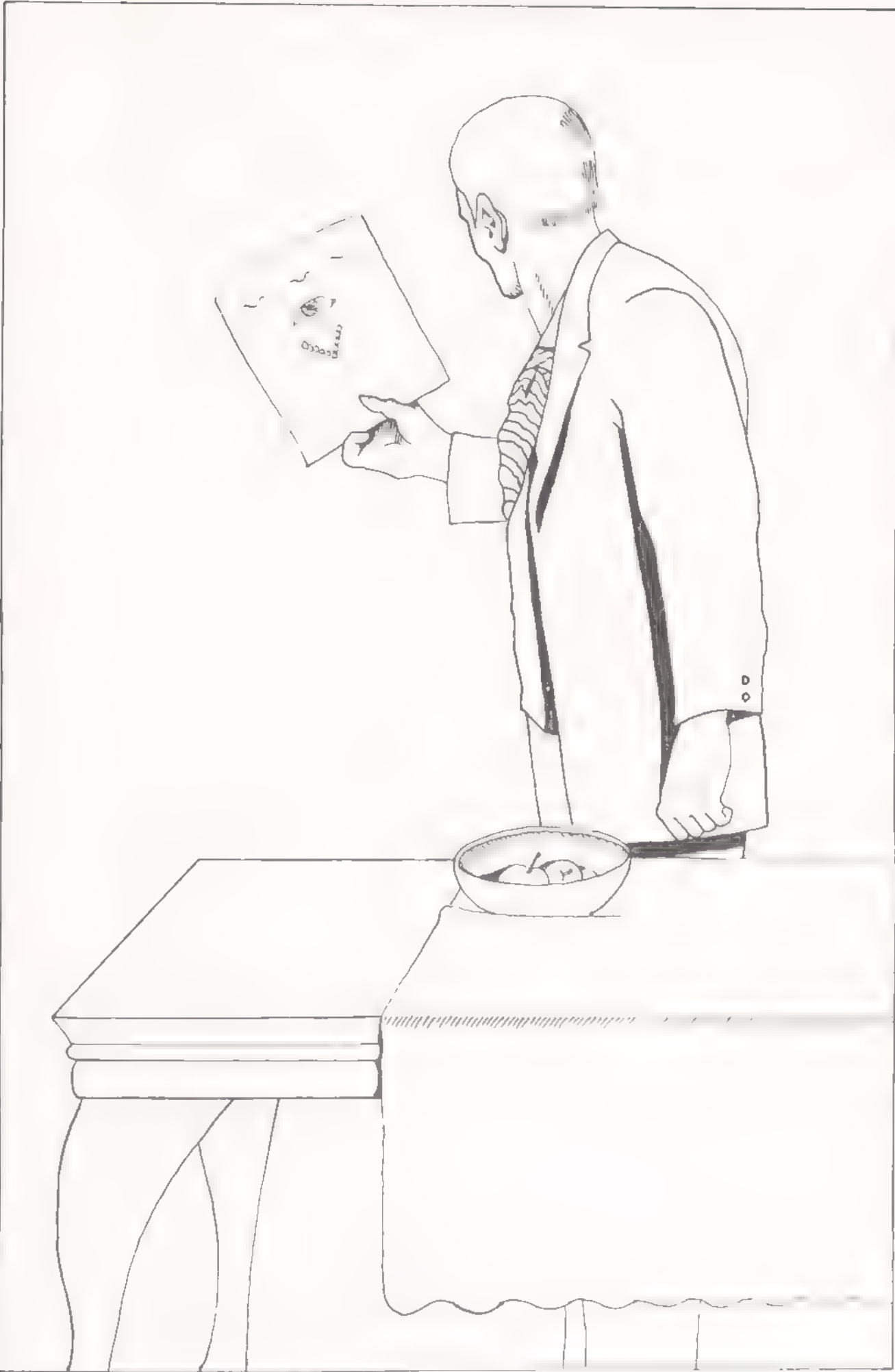
"How often?"

"Well, perhaps twice a week. Uncle Randall finally went out to look for it—he and Michael, the gardener—and once Aaron went out on a Sunday afternoon to go over the grounds with him. That frog is rather a large one, I understand—larger than our native frogs, and they would have seen it, as thoroughly as they hunted. They didn't. My uncle finally refused to consider that it might actually be the frog because it would not survive at liberty in this climate. He said the cry of that frog was also used as a signal by members of an African secret society before the turn of the century. The British had put an end to it at Benin. In the past fortnight, every time Uncle Randall has heard the frog call he has become dreadfully restless and disturbed—he would turn on the gramophone to drown it out, and pace about muttering that sort of thing. Or dash outside in an effort to find the source of the call. I cannot help feeling that there is some sinister danger threatening him, Mr. Pons, and I would like you to look into the matter."

Pons took a turn about the room before he replied. "I very much fear, Mrs. Morley, that without his co-operation there is little I can do. But tell me—if he was at Benin in 1897, where were you?"

She smiled. "Mr. Pons, I was born a little later. Both my parents went down on the *Titanic*. Then for five years I lived with my mother's sister. After her death, I came to live with Uncle Randall, my father's brother. That was—let me see—about 1917. He has been like a father to me. Even after I married two years ago—my husband is an officer of the Merchants' Bank in Basingstoke—he insisted that we should live with him. My uncle is rather reclusive by nature, and it is rather more as if he were our guest than otherwise."

"The three of you make up his family?"



"Not entirely. My brother Paul also lives there. Paul is a solicitor in Basingstoke. He has not married, but it is understood that when he does so he will make his home elsewhere."

Pons tugged at the lobe of his left ear as he frequently did when deep in thought. "Is your uncle accustomed to speak of his military service?" he asked then.

"Oh, no. Quite the contrary, Mr. Pons," cried our client, leaning forward a little, wide-eyed. "It was altogether such a horrible experience that he has always refused to talk about it. I do believe this harassment—for it is that—disturbs him because he is reminded of those terrible events."

"No doubt," said Pons. "Now, tell me, Mrs. Morley, do you know whether your uncle brought back from service in Africa the typical souvenirs many soldiers do bring home?"

"Oh yes, indeed. He has some particularly ugly pieces. They are on a shelf in his study—not really very visible, to tell the truth, as if they too reminded him of those bygone events."

"Thirty years ago! I submit that is rather a long time to be disturbed, Mrs. Morley."

"My uncle is an uncommon man, Mr. Pons." She clasped her hands suddenly and cried, "Oh, I hope I have not done the wrong thing in coming here!"

"I assure you, you have not," said Pons gravely. "I only wish there were some way in which I could be of immediate assistance. Perhaps we had better come down to Basingstoke tomorrow and pay your uncle a visit."

"He is in danger, then?"

"I fear he is in the gravest danger, Mrs. Morley," said Pons.

Our client sprang to her feet, her clasped hands pressed to her breast. "Oh, Mr. Pons! I knew it! It's what happened in Africa—I know it!"

"Why do you say so?"

"Because we have seen a strange black man in the vicinity," she said. "Aaron saw him first. Then one day when we were both in Basingstoke, we caught sight of him slipping into a side street. Aaron said at once, 'That is the man I saw at the wall.'"

Pons shook his head slowly from side to side. "Pray implore your uncle not to go again in search of that frog, Mrs. Morley."

"Oh, he is so stubborn, so stubborn!" she cried.

"You have given us no address, Mrs. Morley," said Pons then. "Though I assume that you live in the country."

"It is Creighton Hall, Mr. Pons, on the London road. You will

have no difficulty finding it. It is a large estate—Ten acres with a substantial copse, a garden, and extensive lawns. A brick wall separates it from the road, and the name is on the gatepost.

"Thank you, Mrs. Morley. We will call just after noon tomorrow."

Once our client had departed, I took up the drawing she had left on the table. "What do you make of this, Pons?" I asked.

"That is a drawing of African facial decoration," he said at once. "The three droplets above the eye—which would be repeated above the other eye, were the face full—represent tribal marks. The *V* of concentric circles below the eye—which would similarly be on the other cheek—are typical African decorations."

"Found at Benin," I ventured.

He nodded.

"Then we may assume that something Creighton did there has come back to haunt him," I said.

"We may indeed. Does not everything point to it? But it is strange, is it not, that Creighton is not more disturbed by the events at Creighton Hall? Mrs. Morley reports no fear, no alarm, no panic—only surprise, perplexity, and at best a little uneasiness and perturbation."

"Why, that is simple," I said. "Creighton evidently committed some crime against that African society of which he was not aware—you remember Mrs. Morley's saying that the call of that frog was a signal used by a secret society of Benin."

"I do."

"They have finally caught up with him."

"What would you say they want of him?" asked Pons.

"Perhaps the return of what he took."

"Some particularly ugly pieces," I think Mrs. Morley said."

"What is ugly to us may not be ugly to them. It is as simple as that."

"I submit it would have been far simpler to break in and take what they want," said Pons. "No, though that is a splendidly imaginative concept of yours, Parker, I fear more is wanted of Randall Creighton than some artifacts or works of primitive art. I daresay nothing short of his life will do. But are they not an interminable time in going about it?"

"I would say so," I agreed. "And what is so horrible in Creighton's experience that he cannot bear to recall it?"

"If he was in West Africa in 1897, it could hardly have been

anything other than the reduction of Benin city. We have been in Benin since 1853, and a rewarding trade has grown up with Benin in ivory, palm-oil, and pepper. But we were appalled by the custom of human sacrifices that prevailed in that country. Sir Richard Burton, when he was British consul at Fernando Po in 1863, went to Benin in an attempt to end that custom, but he failed. Since 1885 the coast of Benin has been under our protection, and at that time every attempt was made to placate the king, though it was not until 1892 that King Overami agreed to a treaty. He did not live up to it. Two years later it was necessary to banish Nana, a Lower Benin chieftain. Then, in 1897, our consul-general, J. R. Phillips, together with eight Europeans, was brutally slain while on the way to visit Overami. As a result Admiral Sir Harry Rawson led a punitive expedition of over a thousand men up the Benin river to fight their way into Benin city. The annual 'customs' had just been celebrated, and the city was found to be filled with the bloody remains of many human sacrifices. Six chiefs were executed, and Overami was banished to Calabar. I daresay Creighton was in that punitive expedition, and it is the sight of Benin city, reeking with gore and the cannibalistic saturnalia that took place before the arrival of the expedition, that he does not wish to remember."

I shuddered. "And, of course, we don't know what some of our men, in the heat of outrage, may have done to the surviving celebrants."

"Precisely," he agreed. "But there are two or three little points about Mrs. Morley's narrative that disturb me."

"The whole thing disturbs me," I retorted. "About those pieces Creighton brought back from Benin—they are surely of no value."

"I would not say so. A Benin bronze went for five thousand pounds recently at Sotheby's."

"You don't mean it!"

"I am not in the habit of saying what I do not mean," he replied testily.

"Then we have a possible other motive."

"You are only fishing, my dear fellow. These waters may be deeper than we know." He picked up the drawing I had dropped to the table a few moments before and studied it in contemplative silence.

I waited in vain for him to speak. "Couldn't it be possible that these tribal marks refer to a tribe associated with that secret society

in Benin which came to some harm because of some action of Creighton's?" I asked finally. "That sounds logical to me."

"I am sure it does," said Pons.

"A warning of what is to come," I went on.

"Why? Why send any warning at all? Is that not the stuff of fiction rather than of life?"

"Life is often stranger and more dramatic than fiction, so much so that fiction often fails to reflect it," I replied.

"*Touché*," said Pons. "And it must be admitted that life occasionally imitates fiction," he added. "But we have too few facts to support any meaningful speculation and it is rather those we have not yet had put to us directly that are likely to solve the problem. Let us just wait until we can call upon Creighton tomorrow."

But our plans were not destined to come about as we had expected, for it was not yet dawn of the following day when I was awakened by the telephone and, thinking one of my patients had suffered an emergency, I answered.

"Mr. Pons, Mr. Pons—please, *please* come at once!" The voice was that of our recent client. "Aaron has disappeared. I've sent a car for you."

I was still attempting to explain that I was not Pons when she rang off.

Pons was up and standing at my elbow when I turned from the telephone. "Mrs. Morley, I take it," he said. "Something has happened to Creighton."

"No—it is Aaron who is gone. Mrs. Morley is sending a car for us."

"Aaron!" cried Pons, his face a mask of perplexity.

"Yes—they have got the wrong man," I said.

Pons said nothing at all. His face was an inscrutable mask.

Creighton Hall, seen in the early morning sunshine, proved to be surprisingly impressive, for it was obviously the home of a wealthy man—a country house of two storeys, a mansard roof, and many gables and rooms set in the midst of a lush green estate.

Our client met us at the door.

"Oh, Mr. Pons!" she cried. "I was too late coming to you."

"We shall see," said Pons, glancing at the man who stood behind her—a thick-necked man of upper middle age, who was visibly keeping his hostility in check.

"This is my Uncle Randall," said our client hurriedly, and introduced us.

"Now you're here," he said ungraciously. "come in." He stood aside and drew his niece close to him so that we could pass.

Pons, however, made no move to enter the house. "Your husband has not returned?" he asked our client.

"No, Mr. Pons. And there has been no word from him. It is unlike him."

"Forgive me," he interrupted. "There is one little detail I must see to while the dew is still heavy enough."

So saying, he turned abruptly, and strode rapidly down the path to the gate. He vanished between the gateposts, only to reappear within moments, walking rapidly along the brick wall separating the grounds of Creighton Hall from the road.

Turning, I saw that Randall Creighton's bushy eyebrows were quizzically raised; our client was no less puzzled. I could hardly explain that Pons's erratic behaviour was integral to his methods.

Pons was now out of sight, screened by the thick growth of trees farther along the boundary wall. Our client looked in the direction he had gone, stepping out over the threshold, one hand pressed against her lips. She turned her head slowly and looked at me.

"Wherever is Mr. Pons going, Dr. Parker?" she asked, with a helpless gesture.

"I suspect, Mrs. Morley, that he is on the scent," I said.

I could not help observing a flicker of amusement on Creighton's face—a barely perceptible twitch.

A second man came to join our client and her uncle, a young man not yet thirty, with yellow hair, blue eyes, and a slightly out-thrust jaw that made him look somewhat pugnacious. He was undoubtedly our client's brother, and so he was introduced.

"We're waiting for Mr. Pons, Paul," explained Mrs. Morley, adding ingenuously, "He has run off."

"I've telephoned the police," he said.

"Oh, you shouldn't have," cried Mrs. Morley.

"Quite proper," I put in. "The thing to do."

Creighton harrumphed.

It was almost a quarter of an hour before Pons reappeared between the gateposts. As he came up, I saw that his shoes were quite wet with dew.

"That black man you and your husband saw, Mrs. Morley," he said, "can you describe him?"

Mrs. Morley was somewhat taken aback. She paused to introduce her brother, then said, "Why, I caught only a glimpse of him. To tell the truth, I couldn't even say for certain that he was black. I

took Aaron's word for it. Black men all look alike to me, in any case."

"They are as different, one from another, as men of any other colour," said Pons patiently. "Was he tall or short—thick-featured or fine?"

"He seemed taller than the average—stouter, too. Aaron spoke of him as very thick-lipped and with a broad flat nose. He had seen him before, as I told you."

"Ah," said Pons. "Large of foot?"

"Aaron said so, yes."

"And did he say that he walked with a kind of loping gait—like someone accustomed to making progress over rough land, perhaps?"

"I believe he mentioned something of that kind," said Mrs. Morley.

"I thought as much," said Pons grimly.

To this dialogue Randall Creighton listened with undisguised amazement. Clearly he had not been told of the black man's presence in the village. He looked at his niece, obviously puzzled.

"I submit, Mr. Creighton, that there are some questions you might answer, if you will," said Pons.

"I suppose so," assented Creighton ungraciously. "We'll go into my study."

He led the way as he spoke. The book-lined study was clearly Creighton's den. It had his masculine look in its appointments and its atmosphere. I saw that a book lay face down on the end table next to an easy-chair, and I read its title with quickening pulse; it was Major John Mellanby's *The Campaign in West Africa*.

"Sit down, gentlemen," invited Creighton and himself sat down where the book lay open. Seeing the book, Creighton gave it an explicable glance of annoyance, shut it and thrust it out of sight.

"Your reluctance to speak of the Benin campaign is quite understandable, Mr. Creighton," said Pons, choosing to stand rather than sit. "But we hear of a West African frog—*Trichobatrachus robustus*."

"Yes, I heard it. No question about that," answered Creighton. "We all heard it, if it comes to that. The point is, it shouldn't have been heard. Not in these latitudes. It cannot survive here, to my knowledge. I don't make a point of being a biologist, but certain things are elementary."

"A nocturnal caller?"

"At least here, sir," said Creighton. He gave Pons an oddly defiant stare. "You may know that the call of that frog was a signal used by members of a secret society of Benin."

Pons nodded.

"All the members of which were destroyed in the campaign against Overami," added Creighton flatly.

"All?" asked Pons.

"All," said Creighton categorically. "I was part of that sickening campaign, sir. I know what I'm talking about."

"Yet everyone here heard it?" pressed Pons.

"Except Meadows," answered Creighton. "His hearing isn't what it ought to be."

"Meadows is our house man," explained Mrs. Morley.

Pons turned to Paul Creighton. "Can you imitate it, Mr. Creighton?"

"I can try," said Creighton.

His attempt was roughly cut off by his uncle. "No similarity at all. None whatever. And what has it to do with Aaron's not coming home? And what, if I may make so bold to ask, has all this interference to say that Aaron just hasn't for reasons that seem sound enough to him chosen not to come home?"

"You have a collection of Benin artifacts, Mr. Creighton," said Pons, turning upon the older man.

"Had," said Creighton crisply. "Had them over in that cabinet against the near wall."

The cabinet was manifestly empty.

Paul Creighton broke in. "There's no mystery about their being gone. Uncle Randall asked me to take them to Sotheby's when I went to London yesterday. He has decided to put them up for sale."

"That's right," said the elder Creighton.

"I don't know how you could stand them for so long, Uncle Randall," said our client. "They were hideous—hideous!"

"Yes, perhaps they are," said Creighton. "It depends on the point of view."

Pons turned to the older man once more. "You received certain drawings in the post, Mr. Creighton."

Creighton shot a glance of baffled anger at his niece, as much as to say, "This is your work!" He said only, "Child's play. They were supposed to represent Benin art. Crudely done. I don't wish to speak of them."

A diffident cough from the threshold attracted our attention. An

elderly servant stood there, waiting for us to turn toward him before saying, "Constable Danbury is at the door."

"Thank you, Meadows," said our client.

Mrs. Morley started for the door, followed by her brother.

"I'd like a word with you, Meadows," said Pons, making it clear by his demeanour that he preferred to speak with Meadows privately.

Randall Creighton grunted, nodded permissively to Meadows, and left the room.

Meadows came cautiously forward, his dark eyes uncertain.

"How long have you been with Mr. Creighton, Meadows?" asked Pons.

"Twenty-five years, sir."

"What kind of man is he?"

Meadows hesitated, searching for words. "Firm, sir—very firm," he said finally.

"Harsh?"

"Only with those who needed it."

"As, for example?"

"Well, for one, Alan Garston. Garston drove for him until Mr. Creighton discharged him last spring."

"Anyone else?"

"Garston was the only one he ever discharged, sir." The old servant did not intend to say more.

"How large is Mr. Creighton's family, Meadows?"

"He has just Miss Miriam and Mr. Paul, sir."

The sound of voices moved upon the study from the hall.

"Thank you, Meadows," said Pons.

"Ordinary fishing," I murmured. "It is unlike you, Pons."

"One must have all the facts in order to reach any conclusion about them," he replied imperturbably. "But the police are now here; the search can begin."

Constable Danbury followed our client into the room. He was tall and slightly stooped, as if in protest against his height. His plain features lit up with a smile at sight of Pons, and he came striding over to him with hand outstretched.

"Danbury, Mr. Pons," he said. "You've not heard of me, but I've heard of you."

"Now you are here, Danbury, we can get on with the search for Mr. Morley. I take it you've been given the details?"

"Yes, Mr. Pons."

"Good. I fancy the copse is the primary object for searching. I daresay Morley will have been drawn to the rear of the house rather than to the front, which is at least partly in sight of the road. I think, Mrs. Morley," he went on, turning to our client, "you had better remain here, in the event of Mr. Morley returning to the house."

So saying, he led the way out of the study and unerringly through the house to the door that opened to the garden, beyond which the thick copse loomed. Through the garden he went, following a well-defined path, and to the edge of the copse.

"Let us just walk in ten feet from one another," proposed Pons. "We will go along the farther edge there, turn when we have gone through the copse, and come back, following this pattern until we have covered the ground."

We struck into the wooded area of the property, which covered perhaps seven acres of it, but was considerably overgrown. I took the edge of the woods, adjacent to grassy pasture. Next to me walked Randall Creighton—then Pons, then Constable Danbury, and finally Paul Creighton.

"Why do you say Morley was *drawn* from the house, Mr. Pons?" asked Danbury.

"By the call of a frog," said Pons, explaining.

"It goes back to Uncle's service in Africa," volunteered Paul Creighton. "Aaron constantly urged Uncle Randall to talk about it. He felt it troubled Uncle."

The elder Creighton harrumphed again, as he vanished into the copse.

"There has been someone thrashing about in here," said Danbury. "Look there and there." He pointed to broken and turned branches. "Somebody used to the jungle would move easier than that."

"Quite right, Danbury," agreed Pons. "We may take it Morley is more likely to have gone through here."

"Have you seen any strange black men in Basingstoke, Constable?" asked Pons.

"From time to time. I don't know that I'd call them 'strange' except as they're strange to me," answered the Constable soberly. "I can't pretend to know everyone in Basingstoke. And the market brings in many people from outside."

"Black?"

"Some."

We reached the far end of the copse, swung around, and made our way to the garden once more. There were further signs of someone's traveling through the copse, this way and that. I could imagine Morley out here in the dark, blundering after an elusive frog call that led him one way and another.

From the garden, we turned back again. By this time we were in the other half of the copse. We went in silence now, intent on our task. Pons, I saw, was unnaturally grim, and the Constable took his cue from Pons.

We had gone a little more than halfway through the copse on our third run when a sharp, half-strangled cry rang out.

"Christ!"

It was Paul Creighton, who stood immobile, frozen in shock, staring down at the earth before him.

Pressing forward, we saw what lay there—the body of a young man, literally hacked apart. Blood spattered a wide area—one arm was cut away—the head was almost severed from the body—at least a score of brutal cuts had gone through clothing and flesh. Protruding from beneath the body was the curious bronze head of a Negro.

Paul Creighton began to back away.

"Aaron Morley, I have no doubt," said Pons.

"Yes, that's what's left of him," said the Constable. "I knew him. This is savage work—no civilized man could have done this."

Randall Creighton, swallowing hard, pointed tremblingly at the bronze head and looked accusingly at Paul Creighton. "You said you took them to Sotheby's."

"I did. Six of them. That's all there were."

"There were seven."

"I took six." He turned and ran blindly back through the copse toward the house.

"Mr. Creighton, I fear it will be your unpleasant duty to inform your niece," said Pons.

Creighton turned and stumbled away.

"That bronze head, Danbury, is a work of primitive art from Benin, the British Protectorate in West Africa where Creighton fought thirty years ago," said Pons. "It represents an *oba* or chief-tain of Benin. Though I doubt that you will find any fingerprints on it, handle it with care."

The Benin bronze was a superbly savage piece, approximately sixteen inches in height. The head rose out of a high choker that

carried all the way to the thick lower lip; it was framed in six strands meant to resemble coral along each side of the face. A reticulated headdress, decorated with coral beads, crowned the head. What struck me instantly, however, apart from its brutal strength as a primitive work of art, was the facial decoration—the I's of concentric circles beneath the eyes, the three tear-like bronze globules ranged above each lashless eye—the same pattern drawn upon the strange message sent to Creighton.

"That black fellow must have left it here," said Danbury. "How can we be expected to find him!"

"Do not look for him, Danbury," said Pons quietly.

The Constable glanced at Pons as if he thought his ears had betrayed him.

"There is no black man, Danbury. He is the product of one man's vivid imagination. I commend him to your attention."

Danbury flashed a curious look at Pons. "I don't follow that, sir."

"Let me draw some facts—however trivial they may seem—to your attention, Constable. It was the late Aaron Morley who saw the black man, who pointed him out to his wife. The calling of the frog, designed to point to the kind of crude and bestial African ritual murder common to nineteenth-century Benin, was meant to lure Randall Creighton to his death. . . ."

"They killed the wrong man," cried Danbury.

"Not 'they,' Constable. An examination of the terrain indicates clearly that only one murderer was involved. Morley was murdered after midnight; by that time the dew had formed. A quick walk around the estate on our arrival revealed no break in the dew—no one walked away from the grounds since midnight. It will be your task to establish a motive, Danbury. I submit that you ought to look into the victim's background as well. Leave no stone unturned.

"Murder was intended here. There was elaborate preparation. So much is patent. I leave the investigation in your hands."

"I have never known you to be so ambiguous as in your charge to Danbury," I said on our way back to London. "If anything, you only added to his perplexity."

"The commission of murder," answered Pons, "apart from that capital crime committed in passion—anger or a jealous rage—or that committed in reaction to being surprised at or escaping from some other crime, like burglary—is not readily embarked upon. The preparations indicated in our client's account pointed clearly

to the murderer's plan to lure Randall Creighton from the house, strike him down in the dark, and lay the blame on the black man Morley had conjured up."

"Our client saw him too," I pointed out.

"She saw a black man her husband said was the same man he had previously claimed to have seen lurking about the wall along the road at Creighton Hall. But so incredible a motive as we were expected to believe—a murder for vengeance after thirty years was so improbable that the stage required extensive setting. The imitation of the frog call over a period of time. The black man deliberately conjured up. All this demanded imaginative care—and a powerful motive."

"Pons, you are speaking in riddles," I protested.

"Come, come—it is plain as a pikestaff. You should have noted other discrepancies—our client, for example, told us her uncle disliked to talk about his African experience: Paul Creighton said, on the contrary, that Morley 'constantly urged' the elder Creighton to talk about it. Our client and her brother had no reason for lying—Morley did. The motive, of course, must have its origin in Morley's pattern of living. I suspect that Morley has been embezzling money from his bank and couldn't wait until Creighton died and at least half his estate came to Mrs. Morley, whose visit to us undoubtedly precipitated the crime, with its simulation of African ritual murder. A quick auditing should determine the state of Morley's accounts."

"But it was Morley who was murdered!" I cried.

"So it was," said Pons enigmatically. "I am not sure I should call it 'murder.' If Danbury follows it through correctly, the plea will be 'self-defence,' I have no doubt."

"You can't mean that Randall Creighton. . . ."

"Who else? He was set upon by Morley, but he was ready for him. The old man obviously had his suspicions. The attack incensed him. Moreover, he very probably knew that, thwarted in this, Morley would try again. He did to Morley what Morley meant to do to him. In matters of this kind, one either accepts the premise laid down, or one does not. The premise implicit in our client's account required too much credulity. Consider—in order to believe that some black from Benin would exact vengeance upon Creighton, it would be necessary to believe that in some manner the black had chanced upon the identity of a given British soldier engaged in the reduction of Benin city, that he had so imbued his son or some

younger relative with the desire for vengeance that he had induced him to undertake the long journey from Benin, learn Creighton's whereabouts, and carry out his mission. That is asking too much of anyone. Small wonder our client's uncle was puzzled and not frightened! The drawing he received in the mail was meaningless — simply something Morley had fatuously copied from the bronze he intended to use. And, having no sense of personal guilt because of that horrible Benin affair, there was no reason for Creighton to be disturbed.

"Since vengeance and passion seemed very improbable motives for doing away with Creighton, one had but to fall back upon such all-too-common motives as greed or the removal of someone who constituted a danger to the murderer. Creighton surely menaced no one, but his wealth was an obvious temptation. Finally, Morley, with his uncertain hours, thought he had ample opportunity to carry out his plan, which included the imitated frog calls, the previous secreting of that Benin bronze with the intention of plainly connecting Creighton's death to his involvement in Benin and the laying out of that book Creighton certainly wouldn't have been reading, to judge by our client's account of him. I do not recall a crime more sanguinary in all my years of involvement in these little inquiries."

"But, Pons — how could you fail to tell Danbury!"

"I submit he has the facts — or he will get them. It is not my purpose to interfere in the course of justice. It must be admitted that Morley got what was coming to him — he sadly underrated Randall Creighton and became his victim instead of his murderer. I am merely a private inquiry agent. I do not look upon myself as an agent of justice, which in this case seems to have been served."

The Adventure of the Seven Passengers

THERE IS a certain name which, when mentioned in his presence, invariably causes my friend Solar Pons to look up with a challenging glint in his eyes but a certain grim tightness of his lips, starting in his mind a reminiscence which embraces some of the most interesting cases of his entire career as an investigator of those curious manifestations of criminal activity which reveal the workings of the human mind. Pons had several encounters with the work of the Baron Ennesfred Kroll, who first came to Pons's attention in a social capacity, for Pons had met him at a ball given at the German Embassy where Kroll, who was a social lion, was a compelling figure, despite his stooped shoulders and his sinister appearance, moving among the throngs at the Embassy ball with a singular ability to attract people to him. Pons regarded Baron Ennesfred Kroll as the prototype of the arch-criminal, and found himself ultimately involved in several adventures in which he recognized the hand of the baron, before he was enabled to trap him. Of these, perhaps two — those chronicled in my notes under the headings of "The Adventure of the Seven Passengers," and "The Adventure of the Lost Holiday," — are most fascinating.

The curious affair of the seven passengers was brought to Pons's attention early one morning in January 1930. Pons had preceded me to the breakfast-table that morning, and was engaged in reading the reports in *The Times* relating to the Naval Limitations Conference then in progress in London.

"Anything new?" I asked, as I sat down opposite him.

Pons shrugged. "Not in the city. An interesting murder in Kent, a robbery of some ingenuity in a small village in Sussex, beyond those, nothing. But here," he continued, tapping the paper at his elbow, "is an admirable opening for something of major interest."

"What is that?"

"The Naval Conference. I fancy an astute spy could cause a considerable disturbance among the envoys of the nations represented here, if he were to announce the plans of the Conference before the proper time."

Pons had just tasted his egg, murmured the customary compliment for Mrs. Johnson, our estimable and long-suffering landlady, and was about to go on with his breakfast, when there came a sudden ring at the doorbell.

"Ah!" exclaimed Pons, his face brightening. He pushed his chair slightly away from the table, and sat listening with a smile of anticipation to the deliberate footsteps of Mrs. Johnson on the stairs.

Her rap was followed by the appearance of her head with its wisps of hair escaping from her heavy coils. "A gentleman to see you, Mr. Pons," she said, and thrust in our direction a card, which I took and handed to Pons.

Pons's eyebrows raised a little in surprise, and a gleam of satisfaction appeared briefly in his eyes. "Show him up, by all means, Mrs. Johnson."

"I see you are pleurably surprised," I observed.

"Elementary, my dear fellow but still, a deduction. We are about to have a visitor from Downing Street." He dropped the card on the table. "I should not be at all surprised if the Naval Conference has encountered some difficulties."

I took up the card. "Mr. Evan Holdridge St. John," I read. "That is both an imposing and attractive name."

"Withal somewhat affected, one might add. Do not be disconcerted to find him something of an elegant."

At this moment there was a light, discreet tap on the door. Pons called out; the door opened, and a young man not quite six feet in height, a dark blond, and by no means unhandsome, walked into the room. He was faultlessly dressed in morning clothes, and carried a stick and gloves. Certainly the word "elegant," which Pons had just used, was not in error in describing him.

"Pray sit down, Mr. St. John," invited Pons. "Dr. Parker and I are still at breakfast, but I could not very well disregard a call from Downing Street, no matter at what hour."

Our visitor, who had seated himself at Pons's invitation, leaned forward, supporting himself on his ebony stick, and glanced cursorily in my direction, biting his lips somewhat uncertainly.

"I assure you Dr. Parker is the soul of discretion. Perhaps I am not amiss in supposing that you are concerned with the Naval Conference, and that something has gone wrong?"

St. John sighed, covered his eyes with one hand, and shook his head. "The bottom has fallen out of it. Everything has gone wrong," he said in a voice that trembled with conviction.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Pons, leaning back and folding his hands. "What precisely?"

"Important papers — I may say, the most important papers of the Conference so far — have unaccountably disappeared. Perhaps it is not too much to say that the entire future of the Conference rests upon these papers."

"Not mislaid, of course?"

Our visitor tapped his shoe impatiently with his stick. "Certainly not, Mr. Pons. The papers were stolen!"

"Ah, that is more like it," said Pons. "Perhaps you would like to tell us exactly what occurred."

St. John nodded and began at once. "We were on the train this morning, coming from. . . ."

Pons interrupted him with a grimace of exasperation. "Pray be so good as to start from the beginning, Mr. St. John. You say 'We' — who, besides yourself? You were on a train — it follows that you spent the night out of the city; yet you are presumably in close attendance upon the Naval Conference."

Our visitor flushed, and his hand closed more tightly upon his stick, a gesture of which Pons took no notice. "I take it you are aware, Mr. Pons, that his lordship, the Minister of War, is convalescing at his country home near Windsor?"

Pons nodded.

"His lordship stipulated that he be fully acquainted with the happenings at the Conference; he desired complete, detailed reports in writing. Since it is largely upon Lord Stapleton that the ultimate results of this Conference rest, his lordship had no difficulty in obtaining his request. In consequence, it devolved upon seven carefully selected men to carry this report to him. Every evening, following the Conference, these seven men, of whom I was one, took a carriage at Paddington. Each man carried in a wallet, kept in his inner coat pocket, a portion of the detailed report in code. I myself carried the most important of the papers; the remaining six men carried the rest. I occupied a compartment alone; my companions divided two compartments between them. In this fashion we arrived at Windsor and reported to his lordship. We were required to spend the night there, and took an early morning train back to the city.

"For the last six days, I was not alone in my compartment. An elderly gentleman, apparently a tradesman of some kind, occupied my compartment with me. This man did not attract my attention

until I began to find that no matter how irregular our hours were at night, he managed somehow to take the same train we did, and showed up promptly at my compartment, for the occupation of which he had most courteously requested and continued to request. I had never in any way attached any suspicion to him, for he seemed a rather harmless and decrepit old person, but I admit to a certain vague uneasiness during the past week.

"Yesterday, as the papers have been hinting all week, marked the crisis of the Conference, and as a consequence we carried in addition to yesterday's reports a fully detailed report of the entire work of the Conference to date. Thus far, the work of this Conference has been most rigidly excluded from the press, and it was considered best for this policy to continue for at least the period of a year. In the meanwhile, carefully censored reports were to be supplied to the press. Should the press at this moment get hold of these genuine reports which were stolen from us this morning as we traveled to the city, the entire work of the Conference would collapse."

It is difficult to conceive in what manner such a collection of papers could possibly be stolen from seven agents," said Pons with keen interest.

St. John gestured with his hands. "They were stolen, Mr. Pons. I can tell you how they were stolen from me, but as for my companions I do not know." He shrugged his shoulders.

"And how were they stolen from you?"

"Unfortunately," said our visitor in some embarrassment, "I believe I fell asleep. At least, I can remember drawing out of Windsor, and after that no more, until I came to my senses in the midst of the roar of Paddington Station."

"You have no conscious knowledge of falling asleep?"

"None!" exclaimed our visitor, shaking his head. "Absolutely none. I could not even swear that I had slept, but it must have been so. The compartment was very close, for the air was chill outside, and there was nothing open."

Pons began to chuckle. "I fancy you have fallen victim to a very clever little plot. Unfortunately, it is rather old, though to all appearances still very workable."

"Indeed," said St. John, "what is it, then?"

"You were drugged, and I daresay your companions were similarly treated, but they, unlike you, are unwilling to admit that they fell asleep at their posts."

"On the contrary, I ate and drank nothing which might have had such an effect on me," protested Mr. St. John.

"Certainly not," agreed Pons. "You very probably inhaled it. Was the old gentleman in your compartment again this morning? Ah, I see in your eyes that he was. And he was nowhere in evidence when you came to your senses at Paddington."

"You are quite right, Mr. Pons. My companion had vanished," answered our visitor, looking ruefully at Pons.

Pons nodded abstractedly. "If I were to ask you to describe your traveling companion I should in all probability learn that his features were very indistinct; he probably wore dark glasses, perhaps also a beard, a heavy coat an ulster, most likely and no doubt also a scarf wound tightly about his neck and chin."

St. John coloured; he opened his mouth once or twice as if to speak, but no words came.

"Am I right, Mr. St. John?"

Our visitor nodded curtly. "You might have seen the man, Mr. Pons. He wore an ulster, yes. He also wore a scarf and dark glasses. He had a moustache, but no beard. Yes," he continued bitterly. "I have been taken in very thoroughly."

"Well, you noticed his height, I am sure," said Pons, in a kinder tone. "That he could not easily hide from you."

"He stood a good six feet, Mr. Pons."

"Very good. That is one point gained. Now, his voice was it that of an old man?"

"It certainly seemed so, though I now have no doubt it was disguised."

Pons nodded thoughtfully. "By the way," he said suddenly. "you have not been long in government service?"

"No, Mr. Pons, I have not."

Pons appeared to meditate for some moments in silence. "You are thoroughly familiar with the effect the early publication of these reports might have?" he asked presently.

"Quite, Mr. Pons. The publication of these reports at this time, aside from breaking up the Conference, would no doubt severely strain our relations with certain powers. There is no question of anything more serious, certainly, but this alone, after such long labour, is not easy to contemplate."

"Which countries might pay a good price to obtain secret knowledge of these reports?"

"Germany would pay perhaps the best price," returned Mr. St.

John after a momentary hesitation. "Spain, Turkey, and Austria would be interested."

"Very good. Then I think it reasonably sound to assume that the reports were taken not for the press, but for the purpose of selling them to another country."

"Exactly," agreed our visitor.

"Has it not struck you as somewhat disturbing that your strange traveling companion stole the papers on the very day that marked the crisis of the Conference?"

"I confess it has, Mr. Pons."

"Yes, it is certainly more than a coincidence."

Mr. St. John leaned forward suddenly. "What do you mean, Mr. Pons?" he asked in some agitation.

"Surely it must be obvious that, regrettable as it may seem, there has been a leak somewhere?"

Our visitor came to his feet and began to pace the floor nervously. "But surely you don't suspect one of us?"

"Until the papers are actually found, I must continue to suspect everyone who had knowledge of these reports to Lord Stapleton. Who, besides the seven of you, knew of this arrangement?"

"Only Lord Stapleton and the Prime Minister," answered Mr. St. John, his face clouding.

"And the other six men with you—their names, please."

"Mr. Harold Edson, Mr. James Greer, and Mr. Ewart Stephens occupied the compartment behind my own; behind them were Mr. Algernon Chambers, Mr. Michael Caermon, and Mr. Emmett McDonough. All these men have been in the government service for at least four years."

Pons made a careful note of the names upon a pad at his elbow, and then for a few moments remained in pensive silence. At last he turned again to St. John.

"You say you seemed to fall asleep just outside Windsor—or better, you remember drawing out of Windsor. Now, Mr. St. John, do you remember whether your strange traveling companion left the compartment shortly after leaving Windsor?"

Our visitor nodded emphatically. "He did. Yes, I remember that, because he had never left the compartment at any time before. He left just as we were leaving Windsor behind."

"And did you hear anything that resembled a popping sound—let us say, similar to the pop of a champagne bottle being opened?"

For some moments St. John sat in silence. Then he said

thoughtfully, "Yes, Mr. Pons, I believe I did. I heard such a sound just as my companion opened the door of my compartment to step into the aisle."

"Ha!" exclaimed Pons in an undertone. "It was glass, then." He looked up at our visitor. "Has the carriage you used been put into service again?"

"No. I anticipated you might wish to examine it, and had it ordered into a siding. If you care to step out and walk this short distance, you may see the carriage at Paddington."

"Later," said Pons. "For the present, you may as well return to the Conference. I will do my best, and if all goes well, I may be able to produce results within twenty-four hours."

"I had hardly dared to hope for that, Mr. Pons."

"If I need you again, I daresay I can reach you through Downing Street."

St. John bowed and left the room. Pons strode rapidly to a window overlooking Praed Street and watched the young man walk to his car. He turned presently and said, "We have just time enough to get over to Paddington before lunch," looking at his watch. "You're coming, I hope."

"Of course," I replied. "But you haven't finished your breakfast, after all."

"I've no time now, Parker," said Pons, and rang for Mrs. Johnson to take the breakfast things away.

At Paddington Station, Pons immediately found the official in charge, and we were quickly taken to the carriage, which had been put on a siding below street level. The carriage was, of course, no different from other first-class carriages of the Great Western Railway. After pointing out to us the compartment occupied by the government men, the official took his leave, and Pons immediately set about examining each compartment in turn.

We entered the first and Pons stood for a moment looking about him. Then abruptly he dropped to his knees and began a minute examination of the floor. I watched him crawl about in some amusement.

"Ah, here it is!" he exclaimed at last. "What do you make of it, Parker?"

I followed the direction of his gaze and noticed near the door the tiny fragments of crushed glass. "Glass," I said, dropping to my

knees at his side. "You were looking for it, then?"

"Surely it was obvious that the seven passengers of these compartments were rather cunningly gassed. Mr. St. John heard a pop—that suggests gas in glass containers—cylinders, I see," he continued, bending forward and picking up a fragment of glass for closer scrutiny. "Note the thickness of the glass—I daresay a condensed gas was used, for this glass suggests pressure. I have no doubt we shall find the remains of one of these cylinders in each of the three compartments occupied."

Pons passed the fragment of glass to me and I examined it cursorily. "What do you think it might have been? St. John seemed entirely unaffected by the gas nor did he mention having smelled it."

"Odourless, obviously odourless. I thought of carbon monoxide, but if I am not mistaken, the use of that gas would result in nausea and subsequent weakness for the victim."

"Certainly, if enough were administered to produce unconsciousness, it would—there are exceptions, of course."

"Our most likely guess is, I daresay, ethylene. It is odourless and colourless, and its effect is similar to that experienced by St. John. It is extremely volatile. I have no doubt that a small cylinder of compressed ethylene would produce exactly the effect desired by St. John's strange traveling companion. Everything was closed, you remember. St. John's companion would only have to crush the cylinder as he left the compartment; in a short enough time, St. John would be sound asleep."

"But the other compartments?"

"That's a matter of conjecture, until we have seen the other six passengers. I daresay our man, having shown himself already so clever, could insinuate a cylinder in the other two compartments with comparative ease. He had only to blunder into them, excuse himself courteously, and crush a cylinder underfoot as he withdrew."

"Yes, it is certainly plausible."

Pons rose to his feet. "It is, however, rather curious that none of the gentlemen was smoking. I should say that Mr. St. John's companion took a long chance."

"But how can you tell?" I asked in astonishment. "Why, you have not even been in the other compartments!"

"Ethylene gas is made up of carbon and hydrogen, a combination

always inflammable, and in its compressed form, explosive; had one of the seven government men been smoking when St. John's companion insinuated his cylinder of ethylene, I fancy there would have been a pretty disturbance."

Pons now made his way to the adjoining compartment. I followed at his heels. An examination of this and the remaining compartment disclosed the remains of two more cylinders—in each case, just slightly beyond the door; a fact which gave further weight to Pons's deduction. However, nothing further was found, and Pons gave up the examination at last, taking with him only a few fragments of the thick cylinder glass found in the compartments. We left the carriage, and, after notifying the officials that it could once more be put into service, proceeded to our rooms.

Once there, Pons began to telephone the other six government men who had accompanied Mr. St. John on his journey that morning. In each case Pons found that sleep had overtaken them, for, under Pons's questions, this admission came quickly. Pons also verified his supposition regarding the insinuation of the glass cylinders into the compartments: St. John's singular companion had blundered into both the other compartments, apparently by mistake, had excused himself and gone out. Had the gentlemen heard a popping noise? Yes, it seemed they had. They smelled nothing, no. And everything was closed. Nor had they been smoking.

Pons turned from the telephone after a considerable time and sat for some moments in deep thought. He rose at last and looked over at the clock on the mantel.

"Time for lunch," I said.

He shook his head. "Not for me. I can dispense with it."

"But you've had hardly any breakfast," I protested.

"No matter," replied Pons. "I find it's imperative I see an acquaintance near Hyde Park at once. Take your lunch, Parker. Pray do not wait for me. It's possible that I shall find a few moments to drop into a restaurant somewhere."

"Well, I hope so. I don't like to see you going off so without your meals."

"Not a good policy, I agree. But I am just beginning to suspect that this matter is not quite as simple as it at first appeared." Pons put on his Inverness and stood at the door, meditatively drawing on his gloves. "I think I shall have the very devil of a time getting my hands on the man—or men, behind this thing."

"Come, you are making too much of the matter," I protested.
"Let us hope so." The door closed behind him.

It was a considerable time after lunch when Pons returned. He came slowly into the room, on his face an expression that boded no good.

"Something has gone wrong?" I hazarded.

"On the contrary," said Pons shortly, "everything is working out too well."

He threw off his Inverness and sat down opposite me. I looked at him questioningly.

"As I told you," he began, "I left for Hyde Park. I know a paid informer who lives near there. I am acquainted with some of them, and at times they come in very useful, since most of them are from the better classes, and they serve me quite as well in their circles as Frick does in Limehouse and Wapping. One of them knows Mr. Evan St. John quite well. I learned from him that St. John has for some time past been intimate with a certain social figure of prominence."

"And this figure?"

"Is, I am sure, the man I should like to trap. If I am not in error, it is he who is behind this thing. We are quite familiar with him through the press—the Baron Ennesfred Kroll."

"Impossible!" I exclaimed.

Pons shrugged his shoulders. "Slowly, Parker! You will remember the German Embassy ball last December and you will recall that I was much interested in Baron Kroll."

"I recall it perfectly."

"Aside from a purely personal interest, I acted on advice from the C.I.D. The Baron has been engaged in several rather dubious matters on the Continent; understand, nothing definite has ever been proved against him, but it remains that more than once someone in his household has been arrested for a serious crime. Strangely enough, the criminal, after pleading guilty and being sent to prison, has in most cases been released. Some power has been at work, and no one who knows him has much hesitation in designating that power as Baron Kroll."

"I took the liberty this afternoon of forcing myself into the presence of the Prime Minister, whose initials you might have seen had you turned over St. John's card this morning when you examined it. I inquired about St. John. It appeared that not much

was known of him; he had been suggested for the position he holds by no less a person than the Earl of Dolchester. He comes of a very good family, but of his capabilities, the Prime Minister knew nothing except what the Earl had written him. I called on the Earl. He was somewhat embarrassed; it had been suggested to him that St. John would be highly capable in this government position. Might I know who had suggested it I might, providing I was discreet. It was Lady Djuna Howard, the Earl's attractive niece.

"To come to the point, I learned that St. John's capabilities had been suggested to Lady Howard by Baron Kroll."

"You *have* got into the thick of it."

"Not a doubt of it. But I have had extraordinary luck; let us hope that it continues. My first step, of course, was to urge the Prime Minister to keep all important matters from St. John."

"You think him an accomplice, then?"

"He is certainly responsible for the leak. But I doubt very much that he is consciously an accomplice. I daresay he is unwittingly the tool of Baron Kroll. In all probability, St. John relates minor state secrets to Baron Kroll never suspecting that the Baron is other than the soul of honesty."

"Do you suggest, then, that St. John's traveling companion was the Baron?"

"No, certainly not. You underrate the Baron, Parker. But I have no doubt that it was one of his agents. I daresay the Baron was many miles removed from the scene of the theft, even though he may now have the papers in his possession."

"Is there no way of verifying that?"

"Yes," replied Pons. "With the assistance of a most gracious lady, the Yard has been in constant touch with the movements of the Baron."

"Why not call Jamison, then?"

"I fancy he will only confirm my assumption." He reached for the telephone and called the Yard, asking for Inspector Jamison, whose voice presently sounded on the wire. There was a brief conversation, after which Pons turned from the instrument with lips tight in anger. "As I thought the Baron spent the entire week at the Earl of Dolchester's country-house; he is expected to return to the city sometime today."

"You are planning to watch him?"

"The Yard kindly lent me a plain-clothes officer, who has been

keeping the Baron's house in Park Lane under eye since early this afternoon."

"Why that glumness, then?"

"Baron Kroll is wilier than you think, Parker. I fear very much I shall not be able to bag him."

"And the Conference papers?"

"I daresay I shall manage them. I shall deliver them to St. John within the time I promised. It is already obvious that the Baron, though the author of the daring and successful plan to get the papers, has no intention whatsoever of appearing personally in the matter. Therefore, the papers, which were stolen by one of Baron Kroll's men, must be delivered to another German agent, who will in turn send them to Berlin. I daresay I can name the fellow who will clear them."

"And who is he?"

"He goes by the name of Hilary Blount, and he lives at Seventeen, St. Anne's Court, Soho. He is better known to the C.I.D. as Stefan Braun, one of the most capable German espionage agents with whom the Yard has had to contend."

"If you know him, surely he could be arrested on some pretext or other?"

"And so ruin the only immediate chance of getting back the papers? No, my dear Parker, it won't do. Braun must have a free hand for the time being. We shall not have long to wait. Unless I am very much mistaken, Kroll's agent will attempt to dispose of the papers as quickly as possible; they are wanted badly by the Home Office, and Braun knows that they will be brought to him. I have no doubt the arrangement has been made by Baron Kroll, who will send to Braun the man who managed to make off with the papers this morning. The pattern is only too painfully clear. If the thief himself is caught, he will no doubt plead guilty, without a breath of suspicion to touch Baron Kroll, who will then immediately turn about and set the wheels moving in the prisoner's behalf. It's a sorry business, but I can do nothing in the face of diplomatic manoeuvres such as those of which Baron Kroll is capable. Nor can we wait on the chance that Baron Kroll may get in touch with Braun; for the papers must be returned before Braun gets a good look at them. If that were not so, perhaps I might have sufficient time to play the game long enough so that in the end I could bag the Baron."

"What if Braun meets the Baron's accomplice somewhere?"

"He will be followed if he leaves his house."

"And the Baron?"

"Anyone leaving his house will also be traced. Simmons, the C.I.D. officer, has enough men at his disposal; I saw to that. Simmons himself has instructions to follow anyone answering to the rather vague description of St. John's strange traveling companion. No one can get into the Baron's house today without going to considerable trouble, apart from Baron Kroll himself. I daresay we are safe in that; but I am equally certain that the Baron will take no chance whatever; the arrangements have already been made and need only to be carried out. Kroll's agent has the papers; Braun is to have them. We are wasting time covering Kroll's Park Lane house; it is the house in St. Anne's Court we must watch.

"Braun lives alone, as most men of his occupation do. He has a charwoman by day; at night he is always quite alone. Moreover, there is an off-chance that the Baron may have the papers sent to another agent in the employment of Berlin—even so, all known agents are being watched. But come, let us have dinner, and then join the men who are watching the house in St. Anne's Court."

Number Seventeen, St. Anne's Court, was a small house of three storeys, set quite close to the street. It had an innocuous appearance, and was not a new building; so much was evident despite the early darkness. One of Jamison's men was in evidence some distance down the court, and another at the corner of Wardour Street not far away. Pons and I took up our position across the court in the shadow of a protecting doorway, and from this venue it was easy to see beyond the partly drawn shade, a solitary figure occasionally cross the single lit window. We had not been in hiding for many minutes, when the door of the house opposite opened, and a short, rather heavy man stood framed in a faint light from behind. This was undoubtedly the German agent, Braun. He stood there briefly, and had just turned to re-enter the house when a taxi-cab careened around the corner from Wardour Street and screeched to a halt before number seventeen.

Braun remained on the threshold, one hand on the door-jamb, as if hesitating to close the door. A tall, cloaked figure left the taxi-cab, said a few words to the driver, and ran rapidly up into the house, past Braun. The door closed; the taxi-cab drove forward and took its stand at the farther end of the court.

Pons immediately led the way across the court, where we were joined by Simmons, who had left his car in the adjoining street. Simmons and Pons held a whispered conversation, after which Pons crouched before the door of Braun's house and looked through the keyhole.

"Locked?" asked Simmons.

Pons shook his head. He reached silently to the knob, turned it, and the door opened for us. The sound of voices came into the hall from an inner room, from under the door of which light shone in a bright line. This door, too, was unlocked, and in a moment Pons had thrown it back.

The three of us, Simmons and myself with weapons drawn, sprang into the room.

"Hands up, gentlemen!" cried Simmons.

The two men in the room presented a picture of contrasts, for, while Braun showed his consternation in the fear and convulsive working of his face, the tall man who had come with the papers remained impassive; if anything, he seemed to regard the three of us with scorn.

Pons went directly to the table. "Ah, I fancy these are the papers we want, gentlemen." He gathered up three packets, examined them briefly, and stuffed them into his inner coat pocket. Indicating Braun casually, he said to Simmons, "Your man. Espionage." Then he turned to the other. "Your name?"

"John Hirsch," snapped our prisoner.

"Employed by Baron Kroll?"

"Say, rather, a free-lance, Mr. Solar Pons."

"You prefer to deny your relationship with the man Kroll?"

"I do not know him."

Pons shrugged. "Hirsch, you are guilty of high treason, but there is an opportunity to grant you a kind of immunity. What part did Baron Kroll play in your well-executed plan? A statement implicating the scoundrel behind you—and perhaps, who knows—we may be able to overlook your part in this little plan. Come, man, what do you say?"

"I say, sir, go to the devil!"

"Ah, very well, then. We shall see to it that Baron Kroll can manage nothing on your behalf. Your man, Simmons."

Outside once more, Pons strode along in deep and silent thought.

"At least," I broke in presently, "you have recovered the papers."

"Hal that is all you see, Parker?"

"But surely you have explained everything else?"

"Ah, indeed! It does not occur to you that I was *meant* to recover the papers?"

"Candidly, no; the motive for that would be beyond me."

"And that we were *meant* to arrest Braun and get him out of the way? The German government has that way of disposing of men whose services are no longer welcome since they are too well known to the police. I fear it is all very elementary; we have served as we were intended to serve; neither Braun nor Hirsch will find a finger lifted in his behalf; and in the meantime, Baron Kroll will plan and execute coups of more significance to the rising desire for vengeance within Germany.

"But, if not this time, there will always be another time for Baron Kroll, and still another, no doubt, and so on, until it is our turn. Let us just be patient and wait upon time."

The Adventure of the Whispering Knights

"THE SCIENCE OF DEDUCTION," observed my friend, Solar Pons, "may at one and the same time be the most skillful kind of rationalization, and the most arrant guesswork. Would it surprise you very much, Parker, if I were to tell you that despite all our preparations, we are not likely after all to be partaking of Mrs. Johnson's admirable fare at lunch-time?"

We were standing on the station platform at Chipping Norton, waiting upon the eight o'clock train for Paddington. Pons had completed work on the curious case of the Cottys Fleece too late the preceding night for the last train to London, and we were now off with the morning's first train.

"Nothing you said or did would surprise me very much," I said. "But since that's our train bearing down upon us, I fear, for once, you're over-reaching yourself."

"One ought not to draw conclusions until one is in possession of all the available facts," said Pons, his eyes dancing. "Look there!" He gestured behind me.

I turned. There, bearing down upon the station as furiously as he could pedal his bicycle, was a police constable.

"I fancy my presence in Chipping Norton was not a well-kept secret," said Pons dryly.

The village glowed in the morning sun, which lay mellowly on its old stone buildings. Sunlight gleamed from the mullioned windows of the Guildhall and the dormers of the almshouses as well as the glass and stone of the fifteenth-century clerestory of the church that dominates the centre of Chipping Norton.

"It's hardly a morning for crime," I said.

"Ah, crime knows no season. You see, he has seen us."

The constable arrived at the same time from one direction as the train came from the other. Dismounting, he started toward us on the run along the platform.

"Sir!" he cried when he came within speaking distance. "I believe you are Mr. Solar Pons?"

"What can I do for you, Constable?" asked Pons.

"I would appreciate your advice on a matter that has come up."

He had now come abreast of us, and stood, a little breathless, trying to compose himself a young fellow of not more than thirty, with firm clear blue eyes, and a very high flush on his thin cheeks. He had a long face, faintly equine in appearance, and wore a sparse moustache that complemented his equally sparse eyebrows and the sandy hair that could be seen below his helmet.

"Ruskin, sir," he said. "That's my name."

"And what is the problem, Constable?"

"I'm afraid it's murder."

Pons looked speculatively at me. "Parker, you have the choice between the train or another of those little adventures you seem to dote upon. Which shall it be?"

"Your choice is mine," I said.

"Capital!"

"Could we step off to the side, sir?" asked Ruskin anxiously. "We ought not to attract too much attention."

Passengers were leaving and entering their compartments.

We moved away from the train to the wall of the station. Constable Ruskin had now recovered his breath and his composure, but none of his anxiety had drained out of his face. He lowered his voice and spoke urgently.

"Sir, do you know the cromlech along the Birmingham road?" he asked.

"Called variously the Rollright or Rollrich Stones," said Pons. "Presumed Druidic in origin, but not one of the more important cromlechs in England."

"Yes, sir, that's right," said Ruskin, nodding. "Not many people visit the stones, that's true. But it is under the care of His Majesty's Office of Works, sir, and there's a caretaker. Well, Mr. Pons, about a hundred yards to the east of the circle is a rather large megalithic burial chamber. We know it hereabouts as the Whispering Knights. This morning two young American gentlemen, studying at Oxford on some sort of scholarship, I understand, were examining the area and came upon what they took to be a mound of feathers and strips of cloth in the chamber. It proved to be the body of an elderly gentleman wearing a mummer's costume. The reported it to the caretaker, who called me. Certain features of the crime impelled me to ask your assistance."

"For instance?" asked Pons.

"Well, sir, it's summer," said the constable earnestly. "The Mummers' Play is put on at Christmas. Not now."

"Ah, mummers still perform hereabouts, Constable?"

"Yes, sir. In many places here in Oxfordshire—Waterstock, near Thame—Cuddlesdon, Leafield, Heyford, Shipton under Wychwood."

"A dying folk drama," murmured Pons. "But perhaps we ought to proceed to the scene."

"If you'll wait here, I'll get a motor from the police station."

He ran off at once, mounted his bicycle, and pedaled rapidly down the street.

"Forgive me," I said to Pons, "but what are 'mummers'?"

"Another proof of the persistence of folklore, Parker," he replied. "Living in London, we tend to be in our own urban way quite as insular as, say, the inhabitants of Chipping Norton. We are unaware of the way in which many of our fellow Englishmen live. Folk customs persist throughout the country—Bonfire Night at Lewes—wassailing the apple trees at Carhampton—the Furry Dance in Cornwall—the Morris Dancers in this shire—market festivals in various places—the Knutsford Festival in Cheshire—harvest celebrations of many kinds. The Christmas mummers date back at least eight centuries, and were once to be found in every English village. They have declined in our time."

"But what do they do?"

"Essentially they re-enact some form of the fight between St. George and the Dragon. It may be King George and some other enemy, but this is the central theme of the performance, which is always done in grotesque costumes concealing their bodies and sometimes masks to hide the faces of the participants. Variations include some symbolic representation of the death of the old year and its resurrection as the new. And sometimes the performances represent sacrificial acts of sowing-time—a survival from pagan times to ensure a good crop of grain. Though the mummers are reputed to originate at the time of the Crusades and to be primarily performers in a Christian ritual, there would appear to be a good deal of paganism associated with the custom. The Mummers' Play is interesting particularly to literary scholars; it seems to be the only survival of pre-Reformation folk drama."

"Are these plays performed by professional actors?"

"No, Parker, the roles are all taken by amateurs. Sometimes, I believe, the roles are handed down from father to son. The plays are always performed by men—six or eight of them—and their characters are standard—Father Christmas, King George, Quack

Doctor, Lawyer, Bold Slasher, Valiant Soldier, Rumour, and Twing Twang, sometimes called Little Johnnie Jack. The characters' names are evidence of the essential medievalism of the mummers."

The train drew out of the station just as Constable Ruskin returned with a car.

Pons and I got into it and we started away through the village and into the country, once the pastureland of thousands of sheep, when, in previous centuries, the western shires supplied most of the wool used by the weavers in the Low Countries. It was an upland of gentle slopes and green valleys divided by streams, and dotted with stone cottages and little villages.

The cromlech stood on high ground almost on the border of Warwickshire. A grove of larch trees towered above the stones, which appeared to be all of local oolite, badly weathered; they were widely scattered, deeply pitted, and manifestly Bronze Age remnants. None was very high; a few of the stones seemed to be almost as high as a short man, but their average height otherwise was three feet. There seemed to be over fifty of the stones, standing upright under the trees, and making a rough circle of about a hundred feet in diameter. Off to the north side of it stood a single tall stone of over eight feet in height.

The caretaker stood alone near the road, waiting for us. He was a stocky man of middle age, with greying side-whiskers framing his square-jawed, dogged-looking features; his dark eyes peered out at us from beneath shaggy brows.

"Mr. Pickering," said the constable, "Mr. Solar Pons of London has come to help us in the inquiry."

"Scotland Yard?" asked Pickering.

"We'll call in the Yard only as a last resort," said the constable hastily, at which Pickering nodded with a quaintly satisfied air, as if for some reason he disapproved of Scotland Yard.

"Right this way, gentlemen," said the caretaker, proceeding across the circle of stones in an easterly direction. Over his shoulder, he asked the constable suspiciously, "Where are the Americans?"

"I have their depositions," said Ruskin with reproving asperity.

Pickering fell into a glowering silence.

"Do the natives visit the stones frequently, Mr. Pickering?" asked Pons.

"Not much, they don't," answered the caretaker. "Some's afeard.

Some don't care. There's old talk about the place. They do say come midnight All Saints' Day, the stones come to life and go down the hill to drink at the spring. There's some believe the old wives' tale that these stones came about when some witchcraft turned a king and his army into stone." He tittered, but almost at once subsided into an uneasy bravado. "But there's witchcraft about! There's some of us hereabouts who know."

He said nothing more, perhaps because he caught sight of Constable Ruskin's tolerant smile.

We came presently upon the ancient burial chamber, a stone-walled recess which framed a grotesque and terrible scene. In the middle of it lay a huddle of cloth strips and feathers held to the ground by a pitchfork.

"Won't go no farther," said the caretaker abruptly, halting well back from the entrance. He pointed an unsteady finger at the strangely attired corpse. "It's Fletcher Dewson—that's who 'e is—and I say'e's been served right. There's others about who ought to be served the same."

Pons walked over to the body, taking care to step apart from such fragmentary prints as could be seen. I did not need to be told to do likewise as I made my way toward the dead man's side.

The costume that confronted us was indeed curious. The dead man wore a sort of imitation flower crown, from which long cloth streamers came down to cover his face. The body was that of a man of seventy or so, a wizened old fellow with a scrawny neck and hands, and a pinched face which, in life, appeared to be no stranger to a fixed expression of displeasure. His body was clothed in a coat and trousers to which had been sewn shorter cloth strips of various colours, mingled with feathers which I took to be those of hawks and owls. To the front along the right side of the coat three dolls were attached in such a way as to be an integral part of the costume. The pitchfork which had been stuck into the dead man's left side—either into or close to his heart—just missed the near doll with one of its tines.

But the fork was not the only weapon. When I parted the long cloth strips that concealed the old man's face, I saw to my horror that his throat had been torn away by the sickle blade of a billhook, still embedded in the flesh.

Pons, however, experienced none of the horror I felt. His eyes were positively bright with interest. "That is the Little Johnnie Jack costume," he said. "Unless I am very much mistaken, the dolls are

associated only with that costume." He turned toward the caretaker, still standing well away behind us. "Mr. Pickering! Was Mr. Dewson a mummer?"

"No mummers hereabouts now," said Pickering.

"Was he at one time a mummer?"

"They do say he was."

"I take it, Parker—judging by the amount of blood—this was the scene of his death?"

"Not a doubt of it," I agreed. "His jugular was severed."

"How long dead?" asked Pons.

"Sometime in the night. Probably about seven hours. That would put the time of his death at around one o'clock this morning."

I got up and stepped back, leaving the field to Pons.

He dropped to his knees beside the body with alacrity, first to examine the costume, then to scrutinize the fork and the sickle blade, after which he gave a remarkably close examination to the ground around the body. In two places he carefully gathered up what seemed to me specimens of the soil and put them into the little envelopes he frequently carried. Then he crawled about along the side of the chamber and out toward the entrance, peering intently at the surface of the earth, both where it was exposed and where it was overgrown with short grass.

He reared back on his haunches suddenly. "Mr. Pickering. How many visitors were there yesterday?"

The caretaker appeared to think. "Don't rightly think we had any," he said finally. "Nobody applied to see the stones."

"And the day before?"

Pickering shook his head. "No visitors for three days. The Americans this morning were the first in the four days."

"Capital!" cried Pons. He pointed to the ground. "We had rain two days ago, and all the footprints are no more recent than last night or this morning. Here we have your prints, Constable. And here are Mr. Pickering's. And these, I submit, are those of the two American students. All have walked in the morning's dew. But this indentation—and this—and this—all by the same foot—were made prior to the formation of the dew; there is dew on them."

Pons was measuring them appraisingly as he spoke. At the edge of one of the prints, where a half-buried stick jutted forth, he bent and picked up another pinch of soil for depositing in an envelope. "Constable, look for a man who favours his left leg—"

"With a limp?"

"I have not said so."

The caretaker muttered under his breath. "Jock Howells!"

"What was that, Mr. Pickering?" asked Ruskin.

"I say Jock Howells. Walks with a limp, 'e does. Not much to notice. He was another of *them*."

"A friend of the dead man's?" asked Ruskin.

"In a manner of speaking. They were in it together."

"I don't follow that, Mr. Pickering," said the constable, showing some exasperation.

"Mr. Pickering," said Pons abruptly, coming to his feet "I take it you had no love for Fletcher Dewson."

"You take it right!"

"Nor Jock Howells?"

"Two of a kind. Always meddling with things better left alone."

"What, Mr. Pickering?" put in Ruskin.

"Nothing city blokes would know about," said Pickering. "They do laugh at us. Warlocks! That's what they were. They did all sorts of dark things - black magic and heathenish rites. Twan't only the wind that talked here in the Knights when there was no wind about!"

Ruskin turned to Pons. "The chamber gets its name from the belief that the wind-like sounds here are the whisperings of the knights turned to stone," he said with an apologetic manner.

"Ay! I've heard 'em," said Pickering.

Pons was not listening. He stood now with his hands clasped behind him, his head bowed, his eyes half-closed, in an attitude of deep thought. Something significant either had occurred to him, or he had noticed some small detail which had certainly escaped me. The silence was broken by the song of a skylark flying ecstatically overhead. Pons's eyes opened suddenly.

"Where did Dewson live, Mr. Pickering?" he asked

"You can see the place from the high ground," said Pickering. "A stone cottage."

"Within walking distance?"

"Easy," said Pickering. "It was one time part of the old estate. The old Dewson estate, that is."

"Ah! Dewson was wealthy?"

Pickering gave a short, barking laugh. "Not 'e! 'E's on the dole." He went on to explain that Dewson's grandfather had been a wealthy man, engaged in the wool trade; he had owned all the land on this side of Chipping Norton, including the cromlech. He had

had two sons, the one preceding him in death, the other—Dewson's father—his sole heir. Dewson had never married, but he had a sister who had, and a brother. Dewson was the only member of his generation left, but he had a nephew—Arthur Keenan—in Africa, and a niece, Miss Rose Dewson, in Banbury. Dewson, his brother and sister had all inherited substantial sums, even after death-duties, but the two men had been improvident, both given to making wild investments in foreign lands and worthless stocks, and his sister had had the bad luck to marry a ne'er do-well, who had gone through her money before taking his own life in Rhodesia.

"Did he see his niece at all?"

"Aye. She came to visit him. Maybe once a quarter. And his nephew wrote him now and then."

"His friends?"

"Not many."

"His enemies, then, Mr. Pickering?"

"Plenty of people had no use for Dewson." He seemed reluctant to say more.

"Why?" Pons prodded him.

"I said it before. Jock Howells and him and a few others—they belonged together—they met and had 'rites.' Mr. Welton—Henry Welton—said Dewson put a curse on his house and his old mother died."

"How long ago?"

"Ten years. Welton never spoke to Dewson since. Hated him."

"Dewson and Howells and their friends were still meeting together?"

"They say not. Two of 'em's dead since."

"I take it this is common knowledge, Mr. Pickering?"

Pickering nodded. "Even the children got out of Dewson's way when 'e came near."

Pons thanked him and turned to Ruskin. "Come along, Constable, and take us over to Dewson's cottage, if you will."

"Certainly, Mr. Pons." He turned to the caretaker. "You stand guard here, Pickering."

Pickering nodded.

Walking across the high ground among the Rollright Stones, the constable asked diffidently, "Was there anything significant that caught your eye, Mr. Pons?"

"Let me direct your attention to the costume, Constable. And to the line of footprints."

"There was but one line of footprints before the dew came."

"That is the significant factor."

"Made by a man who favoured his left leg when he walked. And, if I read them rightly, a heavy man."

"I doubt you have read them rightly, Constable."

We got into the car once more, and went on for a short distance to stop before a tidy stone cottage, along the front of which blossomed purple loosestrife and stonecrop.

"This was once a shepherd's cottage, I believe, sir," said Ruskin. "It probably kept him and his family."

"Cramped quarters," said Pons.

"They were all small houses, Mr. Pons."

The constable tried the door. It gave, opening upon a compact sitting-room, off which, in turn, doors standing ajar gave upon a cubbyhole of a bedroom and an equally small kitchen. Pons's attention was immediately drawn to fragments of cloth which lay on the floor of the sitting-room.

"Are those not pieces of a mummer's costume?" he asked.

Ruskin picked up one of them and handed it to Pons. "This is evidently where he dressed."

"Or was dressed," said Pons. "I submit, Mr. Ruskin, that Dewson was dressed here by his murderer, while the former was unconscious. You must have noticed how badly the costume was put on."

"I did that, Mr. Pons."

"The costume is an old one, and the material none too sturdy. See here." He took the ragged strip of cloth and tore it easily in two.

"I see," said the constable. "Then if Dewson was knocked out here, he was carried to the cromlech. That implies not a heavy man, but a strong one. The imprints were deeper than the others because he was carrying Dewson. And there must then be some connection between the scene of Dewson's actual death and the practises of which he was alleged to be guilty."

"Capital! Capital!" cried Pons. "You scarcely have need of my assistance, Constable. I commend you. But let us not proceed too hastily. I think it certain that Dewson was knocked out here, costumed, and then taken to the Whispering Knights to be killed. Beyond that point we ought not yet to go. Let us just look about a bit."

He dropped to his knees to examine the worn floor, while the

constable examined the top of a small bureau which stood against one wall, in lieu of its proper spot in the bedroom, which was too small to accommodate it, and, finding nothing of significance there, began to pull open drawers, from one of which he took a packet of letters. He took out one of them, removed it from its envelope, and read it. Then another.

"Well, his niece wrote to him," Ruskin said presently. "And so did his nephew. They evidently cared for him, even if his neighbours had some reservations about him. Listen to this from Keenan: 'Dear Uncle Fletcher, I am just in from the bush and find yours of the seventh. I don't have much money right now, but I am sending you something. You can buy yourself a little tobacco with it.' The old man must have been asking him for money! 'I hope you are keeping well and are in good health!' - Miss Rose wrote along similar lines, but didn't send any money. Here she is - 'If I could be sure you would not spend the money on vile tobacco or liquor, I would send you some. Why do you not permit me to come for you and bring you to stay a while with me here?' A Puritan, Mr. Pons."

Pons came to his feet again. Ruskin handed him the packet of letters and Pons went rapidly through them. "Yes, he must have been asking often for money," he agreed. "And both niece and nephew were concerned about his health. They asked repeatedly after it - Miss Rose with moral observations, Keenan with none."

Ruskin, who had rummaged further in the drawers, came out with a long envelope across the face of which had been scrawled "Papers." "Now this looks like something, Mr. Pons," he said, and exchanged it for the letters.

The envelope was not sealed. Pons drew out first a list of debts Dewson had drawn up; some were marked "Pd." and some were not. The old man was still in debt by approximately a hundred pounds. The next paper was a melancholy one indeed; it was a list of his bad investments - stock in long bankrupt corporations, mythical "oil lands" in Canada, deeds for parcels of worthless land in Kenya, India, and Rhodesia. The list revealed only too well what Fletcher Dewson had done with his inheritance - he had squandered in this fashion between five and ten thousand pounds.

"A man without judgment, seemingly," observed Pons.

He drew out the last of the papers. This proved to be a simple will, dated ten years before, in which he left "all my mortal goods, property, and whatever I die possessed of" to his niece and nephew

with the pathetic adjuration that "they not squander it as I have done."

The constable chuckled. "Precious little he left them to squander."

Pons handed the envelope back to Ruskin. "I suppose you will have to notify these people, Constable."

"Yes. Miss Rose will be no problem. But if Keenan's in the bush, there's no telling when he can be reached. Miss Rose will probably take charge of the arrangements. Keenan couldn't get here, anyway, in time for the funeral, and he's hardly likely to come at all."

"I think we've finished here," said Pons then. "Tell me, Constable, where can we find Jock Howells?"

"He's the licensee of the Black Fleece at the edge of the town. On the Charlbury road."

Pons consulted his watch. "I think, Mr. Ruskin, our best course would be to re-engage our rooms at the White Hart. We can catch the midday train to London and be back in Chipping Norton late tomorrow. I have one or two little things I must attend to in London."

"Do you think Howells had a hand in it, Mr. Pons?"

"In time, with our combined efforts, we shall manage to determine that, Mr. Ruskin," said Pons affably.

Pons remained uncommunicative throughout the balance of the morning and the brief lunch we took before we caught the 12:48 train for London. Once in our compartment, however, he broke his self-imposed silence.

"What do you make of it, Parker?"

It was the kind of leading question designed solely to elicit from me my own frequently wide-of-the-mark opinions. He knew very well I could not resist the challenge. "It seems to me plainly a case of murder for vengeance."

"Does it not!" he cried. "It recalls to memory the death of Ann Tennant in Long Compton, in 1875. She was an old woman of eighty, stabbed to death with a pitchfork by one James Heywood who declared her a witch. The fork and the sickle are held to be peculiarly effective in the disposal of witches and warlocks."

"And Dewson was reputed to be a warlock," I put in.

"So we've been told. It does not seem strange to you that he should have been clad in his mummers' costume?"

"All this superstitious rigmarole is mummerly."

"I beg to disagree," said Pons. "The Mummers' Play is a Christian ceremony. Wizardry is its direct opposite. That is diabolic work, Parker."

"Oh, come, Pons!" I cried. "Surely you don't believe in such claptrap!"

"It is not what *I* believe, but what the late Fletcher Dewson's neighbours may have believed. I, for one, find it difficult to credit one's confusing the Mummers' Play with the black arts."

"I have just done so," I said.

"Ah, but you are not a countryman, Parker."

"And why the cromlech as the site for the murder?" I asked.

Pons chuckled. "That poses yet another perplexing question. The cromlech is presumably of Druidic origin. Whether Druidism was the survival of an ancient form of oak-tree worship or whether it was the cult of the wise seeker after truth the authorities are divided on this point — is immaterial. What is significant here is the indisputable fact that Druidism was a form of pagan religion. Dewson's murder in the Whispering Knights therefore draws together three conflicting mythologies, each one opposed to the others. Either this was done out of ignorance or with design."

"Could it not have been simple coincidence?"

Pons brushed this contemptuously aside. "No, no, Parker. It is elementary that this crime was committed in this fashion to impress upon us Dewson's past affiliation with some bucolic cult of diabolism."

"Perhaps they once performed their play at the cromlech?"

"The Mummers' Play is customarily performed in the villages at Christmas or in the fields at the sowing — and before an audience. There could be no conceivable reason for the performance at the cromlech, where the very stones would be in their way. The Christmas mummers frequently visit the principal residences during the day, perform before them, and then repair to the inns after dark. The Mummers' Play demands an audience of people — not of stones, Parker."

"Well, it's certainly a puzzle."

"If intended to be so, it is meaningless. But the confusion may not have been intentional," said Pons enigmatically.

Thereafter he said no more, but sat with his head bowed and his eyes closed to the lovely English countryside flashing past the windows of our compartment — through that country Hopkins had so memorably described as "Cuckoo-echoing, bell swarmed, lark charmed, rock-racked, river-rounded," a land of drowsy rivers lined

with willows. And so he sat until the train drew into Paddington in late afternoon.

Once back in our quarters at 7B Praed Street, with our patient landlady, Mrs. Johnson, getting dinner for us, I went around to arrange for my *locum* to continue in office for a few more days anticipating our return to Chipping Norton, while Pons repaired without delay to his chemical apparatus.

On my return, I found Pons just sitting down to dinner. As I joined him, I saw that his eyes were dancing.

"Aha!" I cried, "you've discovered something in your envelopes."

"I have indeed," he replied. "Evidently the late Fletcher Dewson was wealthier than his neighbours suspected."

He pushed over to me a piece of black paper on which lay three tiny particles of what appeared to be glass—one as large as a grain of sand, the others hardly more than dust motes.

"Crystals of some sort," I said.

"These little pieces are technically known as diamond dust, Parker," said Pons.

"Yet he begged tobacco money!" I cried. "You found them in the house?"

"No. In the burial chamber."

"But how came they there?"

"Ah, that is indeed an intriguing problem, Parker. They were in one envelope only—the last I filled. The other envelopes yielded nothing but the expected soil, some fragments of old peregrine falcon feathers, evidently crumpled from the mummer's costume, which appeared to have been quite old and long in disuse, and some particles of cloth either from the costume also, or from Dewson's clothing—or both. I have sent off a wire to Constable Ruskin suggesting a more intensive search of Dewson's house and garden, particularly the latter, since the soil also revealed grains of a kind of blue-green serpentinous rock. I observed nothing of this sort at the cromlech or in its immediate vicinity. It suggests kimberlite."

"That puts a different complexion on the murder," I said.

"Does it not!" agreed Pons.

"If he had valuables hidden at his place—and his companions in diabolism somehow learned it!"

"Gently, Parker. I fancy we may stray too far afield. Can you get away for a few more days?"

"I've arranged for another week."

"I fancy we'll not need that long. We'll take the 2:10 from Paddington tomorrow afternoon."

A short, buxom woman, clad in a severe black ensemble and wearing a pince-nez from behind which sharp eyes looked out, waited for us at the White Hart late the following afternoon. The receptionist made a sign to her at our entrance, and she rose at once to face us, her mouth prim and her mien stern.

"Mr. Solar Pons?" she asked as Pons strode up. At his nod, she introduced herself. "I am Miss Rose Dewson, Mr. Pons. I came to ask that you spare no effort to discover the murderer of my uncle. He was not a man of strong moral character, but he scarcely merited such a death as this."

"Will you come up to our room, Miss Dewson?" asked Pons.

A flicker of disapproval crossed her face. "That would hardly be proper, Mr. Pons," she said. "Thank you, no. What I have to say can be said here. I have saved enough money for your fee, and I know my cousin will join me in this."

"Ah, you have heard from him?"

"I cabled him at once. I had his reply only an hour ago. He expects to leave Somabula within twelve hours. While he cannot be in time for the services, he will be here to help settle my poor uncle's estate. Now, Mr. Pons, is there any help I can give you?"

"You saw your uncle from time to time?"

"Yes, Mr. Pons, Uncle Fletcher was a most improvident man. He did not know how to take care of money. It isn't given to some people. He was one such. I came sometimes to bring him a hamper of food or to take him out to dinner."

"Your uncle was in straitened circumstances?"

"Mr. Pons, he had been in want for a long time."

"Did he ever, at any time, suggest that he had hidden resources?"

She smiled fleetingly. "Mr. Pons, the very idea is totally ridiculous. If he had such resources, he would have spent them on liquor, tobacco, or on his cronies in the pubs. Mr. Pons, I assure you, my uncle was a poor man. My cousin and I have been contributing what we could to him from time to time."

"Ah, you have been in touch with Mr. Keenan right along?"

"Hardly," she said. "A card at Christmas, no more, up until about two years ago when he wrote to inquire about Uncle Fletcher's health. It surprised me a little, because I had always un-

derstood my cousin to be in the family image inimical to real work, and more or less indifferent to the rest of the family. But many people change with age. Since that time Arthur has written perhaps once a quarter. He seems to be now engaged in mission work among the natives in Rhodesia and surrounding areas, and his kindness toward Uncle Fletcher shows that some Christianity has taken root in him."

"Miss Dewson," said Pons then, dismissing her cousin, "I am not clear in mind as to your uncle's habits."

"Mr. Pons, he lived as a sort of recluse. Oh, he used to go about, but nowadays he seldom went anywhere but to the pubs, especially Jock Howells's Black Fleece."

"We hear tales of his interest in diabolism."

Miss Dewson immediately seemed to withdraw into herself. "I know nothing of that, Mr. Pons."

"He was found, you know, dressed in his mummer's costume and put to death precisely as warlocks and witches were done away with in centuries past," said Pons.

"My uncle did take part in the Mummers' Play at Christmas, Mr. Pons," said Miss Dewson. "I believe he took the role of Little Johnnie Jack—he was not a big man, you know, but short and slight, and he fitted that part. Of course, it may be uncharitable to suggest it—but you do realize that much of the Mummers' Play was performed in the inns and pubs, and I suppose my uncle, who was much given to the consumption of alcohol in various forms, was hardly averse to performing in such places and reaping the customary liquid reward." Of Fletcher Dewson's reputed diabolism she said not a word.

"Very well, Miss Dewson," said Pons. "I will undertake the inquiry."

"Thank you, sir. You will find me at 147 Cherwell Street, Banbury—along the river—if I can be of further help to you."

She smiled tightly, turned, and walked out.

"A tartar," I said.

Pons's eyes twinkled. "She is a lady who knows precisely what she wants, and whose world is clearly divided into what is good and what is bad—and liquor and tobacco are bad, no mistake about it."

We mounted to our room.

"Well, Parker," said Pons, "what ought our next move to be? We shall see how well you've studied my methods."

"Why, that's elementary," I said. "We'll look up Jock Howells."

"Precisely! It delights me to observe your progress. We shall do just that, after a bite of supper."

Before we could leave our room, however, Constable Ruskin presented himself at the door.

"Come in, Constable!" invited Pons. "I see by the look on your face you're more perplexed than ever."

"I am, Mr. Pons," said Ruskin, taking the chair Pons propelled forward. "I am that. Your wire now. . . ."

"Ah! You searched the house?"

"Thoroughly."

"And found nothing?" hazarded Pons.

"Nothing. Not even a copper. I doubt the lot of his stuff would fetch ten pounds."

"Curious! Curious!" murmured Pons. "As to the garden, Constable. . . ."

"No evidence of digging there for a long time. But we didn't dig much. There's nothing in the soil there, Mr. Pons."

"No metal," said Pons dryly. "Tell me, Constable, is there any blue clay or rock on the property?"

"None, sir."

"Do you know of any in or about Chipping Norton?"

Constable Ruskin looked dubious. "I do think there's a bit of blue clay on the Welton land."

"Henry Welton?"

"Yes. He has a farm out of Chipping Norton. Raises some corn, and has a few pigs and sheep."

"Pons, is not that the same man who disliked Dewson?" I put in.

Ruskin replied. "He was only one of many, Dr. Parker. Pickering didn't exaggerate at all; I may even say he understated the case. Dewson led a reclusive life. He stayed at home during the past ten years. Now and then he showed himself in Chipping Norton to shop, or he went to the Black Fleece. People normally begin wondering about those who keep to themselves too much, and from the wondering the talking begins."

"There is, however, no doubt but that Dewson was a member of a group that dabbled in diabolism?" asked Pons.

"None. We've been to see Howells. He won't admit it, he won't deny it. We're official, you see. I thought, now, if you could go out there, Mr. Pons . . . ?"

"We expect to, Constable, directly after supper."

"He's an irritable man, sir, and no stranger to violence."

"Nor am I," said Pons, chuckling.

Howells did indeed offer a formidable appearance where he stood behind the bar of his pub when we entered it an hour later. He was a stocky, broad-shouldered man of sixty or thereabouts; his face was grizzled with a short, black stubble, but even a thick moustache did not conceal a sensuous, full-lipped mouth. His eyes were as black as his hair.

We went directly to sit at the bar, where Pons ordered a bitter, and I a draught of ale. Howells served us in silence. I observed, as he moved back and forth, that he distinctly favoured one leg, and saw that he was manifestly strong enough to have tossed a small man like Dewson on to his back and carried him easily.

"Retired seaman?" said Pons casually.

Howells gave him a sharp glance.

"Late of the *Cathay Prince*," Pons went on.

"Near thirty years ago," Howells growled, suspiciously.

"Retired because of injury to your left knee," continued Pons.

Behind Howells on the wall, I saw the framed photograph of the *Cathay Prince* Pons had seen.

Howells now came over to stand facing Pons. He gave him a hard look. "What's your game, Mister?"

"I want a word with you, Jock."

"You've had it."

"Ever hear of a man named Crowley? Aleister Crowley?"

"What's it to you?"

"The sooner they find out who killed Fletcher Dewson, the sooner they'll let you alone."

Howells flung himself away with an angry snarl. "What's all this about Dewson? They were bothering me before he got killed. First it was that reporter from London. I was fool enough to talk. Then the police. They were here half the day. What's your business?"

"I've been asked by Dewson's family to look into his death," said Pons.

"What's done's done," said Howells. "Sure, we played with Crowley's cult. Devil worship and all that. No harm in it. We never did any harm. But the word got out and talk blew it up to far more than it was. Spells—curses—suchlike—all just words. Never came to

a thing. Only *they* thought it did. Welton and Forham and that lot. Dewson family or police — I'll give you one question and that's it."

"Tell me about the reporter who bothered you," said Pons.

For a moment Howells stood agape. Then he shrugged. "Came in maybe eight, nine days ago," he said. "Name of Brown — Ted Brown. Short, slow-moving fellow, about forty-five, for all his thick beard. Wanted to write some kind of story about queer country customs and lore. That sort of thing. I told him about our mummers — we've not done that for years, either — and I talked to him about the little coven we had for the cult, for all it was over and done with long ago. Old Fletch was in here that day, and when he went out I told Brown he'd been one of us. I gave him a few other names. He came in once or twice after that. Asked about Old Fletch and the others. Seemed to think it funny — laughed a bit at us. I saw him nosing about still this afternoon. He had a room at the White Hart."

"Thank you, Mr. Howells," said Pons.

"What about Dewson, now?" asked Howells, surprised.

"One question, I think, you allowed me," said Pons. "You answered it. I know enough about Fletcher Dewson. If you don't mind, I'll use the telephone and we'll be off."

I waited while Pons put in a call. Then we set out from the Black Fleece to walk back to the White Hart.

"I've asked Constable Ruskin to meet us," said Pons. "Unless I am very much mistaken, we will be on our way back to London by the late train, thanks to Old Fletch's friend."

"Howells!" I cried. "Why, he told us nothing."

"On the contrary. He gave us the only possible corroborative information." And, having said so much, Pons would say no more, but strode along with an enigmatic smile on his lean, hawk-like face.

Constable Ruskin waited for us at the White Hart

"Constable," began Pons without preamble, "we'll want Mr. Ted Brown, who is registered here."

Ruskin did not question Pons, but went immediately to the receptionist at the desk and asked for Brown.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Ruskin," she said, "but Mr. Brown left a few moments before you came. He expected to take the 9:28 for London."

Pons looked at his watch. "A quarter past nine. We have enough time. Brown very probably walked to the station. Parker arrange

to pay our bill. We'll take the same train." And to Ruskin, as he came back from the desk, he said only, "I submit it is of the utmost importance that we talk to Brown before he leaves Chipping Norton. His information will be decisive."

"The car's outside," said the constable. "We can be there in a minute."

We reached the station platform at Chipping Norton almost on the heels of the man we sought, for he was the only bearded passenger awaiting there—a short man, jaunty in appearance, though he walked with singular dignity.

"Look at his shoes, Parker," murmured Pons.

I saw that one shoe was creased with use; that on the left foot was smooth.

Pons went directly up to him and stood, towering over him, to ask, "Mr. Brown? Ted Brown, representing—?"

"*The Daily Express*," said Brown.

"My name is Solar Pons. You may have heard of me."

"I don't know the name," said Brown coolly, making his indifference to us plain.

"Mr. Brown, let me introduce Constable Ruskin," said Pons. "Constable, let me introduce Ted Brown—a reporter who has been busy exploring country lore in Chipping Norton. Mr. Brown is more correctly known as Arthur Keenan, late of Somabula, Rhodesia; he has been busy murdering his uncle so that he can come into control of some diamond-bearing property Fletcher Dewson didn't know he owned."

For a moment Pons's extraordinary announcement seemed to freeze the four of us into a tableau. Then, with an oath, Keenan flung his bag full in Pons's face—the constable dived for his legs just as he turned to run—and I fell upon him. After but a brief scuffle, Keenan was subdued.

"Ah, there comes our train," said Pons, brushing dust from his coat. "I'll send you a *précis* of the evidence, Constable, and if you need us, we'll come back in time for the Assizes."

"As I saw it," explained Pons once we were comfortably settled in our compartment and on the way to London, "the solution of the puzzle turned upon the manner of Dewson's death, specifically, on the curious confusion of mummery, Druidism, and diabolism. We were meant to believe that Dewson had been murdered by someone who believed him a warlock—hence the pitchfork and sickle as

instruments of death. But for this, neither the mummer's costume nor the setting in the Whispering Knights was pertinent. It followed, therefore, that if the primary assumption were correct—that we were intended to associate Dewson's death with his diabolism—the murderer was ignorant of the fact that there was essentially no connection with the mummer's costume or Druidism.

"I submit that no one native to Chipping Norton would be unaware of this. This suggested, of course, that the real motive for Dewson's death was unrelated to his diabolism. My findings in the Whispering Knights, however, implied a stronger motive than mere vengeance. You will recall that the third pinch of soil—that containing the diamond dust—which I took from the burial chamber came from the embedded footprint beside a twig which had undoubtedly caught in the turn-up of the murderer's trousers, for Dewson, we know, did not walk to the cromlech. Now, anyone, working with diamonds, could have collected such dust, but only someone close to their source in kimberlite pipes—as the blue-green serpentinous diamantiferous rock is known in Africa—could have also carried with him the grains of that rock.

"Diamonds, you may not know, are found in Europe only in Siberia and the Urals. In Africa and India, yes. In Brazil, British and Dutch Guiana, in Borneo and Australia, among the alluvial deposits and the moraines of several of the United States, notably the Carolinas, Wisconsin, Michigan, California, and some others. But certainly not anywhere in England. Furthermore, the kimberlite pipes are to be found only in Africa. They give Kimberley its name—one long associated with diamonds in the popular imagination. So we are left with an obvious conclusion—that Dewson unwittingly owned diamond-bearing property among all the 'worthless' land he had bought, and the bankrupt investments he had made. But Keenan—who was on the spot—discovered it, and what was mistaken for his solicitude and concern about his uncle's health was instead the expression of a hope that he might hear that his uncle's health was failing. Fear that the old man might somehow learn about his potential wealth overcame his judgment.

"He grew impatient and came back to England, bent upon killing his uncle and asserting his claim as one of his uncle's heirs. Very probably he planned to let his cousin keep the cottage in exchange for the 'worthless' land in Rhodesia. He had not been in England for a long time; he may not even have been born here.

though I should think it probable that he was and left with his parents for Africa as a child. He came to Chipping Norton posing as a reporter and under a false name—surely there must be almost as many Ted Browns as John Smiths in the English-speaking world!—and, nosing about, hit upon the gossip of Dewson's diabolism. It seemed to him that local hatred and superstitious fear of Fletcher Dewson offered a perfectly credible motive for his murder, one far removed from the real motive. No one would have believed that someone had broken into Dewson's cottage and murdered a man on the dole for his money!

"Keenan was reasonably secure. He was unknown. Moreover, his beard was a natural disguise. He was on his way to London or some intermediate station between Chipping Norton and London to remove his beard and, after an interval long enough to allow him 'time' to reach England from Rhodesia, where he undoubtedly had a confederate waiting to answer the cablegram he knew would be sent, he meant to appear in Chipping Norton and play the role of the grieving nephew. As you saw, he had a surgical boot, which was betrayed in the footprints found at the Whispering Knights.

"In his greed, he over-reached himself."

"And any doubt you might have entertained was surely dissipated when Keenan confessed he had never heard of Solar Pons," I said.

"*Touché!*" replied Pons, settling back with a chuckle for the slow journey home.

The Adventure of the Intarsia Box

SOLAR PONS AND I were at breakfast one bright morning only a week after our return from the country and the curious affair of the Whispering Knights, when the door below was thrown violently open, and there was a rush of feet on the stairs that stopped short of our threshold. Pons looked up, his grey eyes intent, his whole lean figure taut with waiting.

"A young woman, agitated," he said, nodding. He flashed a glance at the clock. "Scarcely seven. It is surely a matter of some urgency to her. The hour has only now occurred to her. She hesitates. No, she is coming on."

The sound of footsteps was now scarcely audible, but they came on up the stairs. In a moment there was a faint, timorous tapping on the door to our quarters, and an equally timorous voice, asking beyond the door, "Mr. Pons? Mr. Solar Pons?"

"Pray play the gentleman, Parker," said Pons.

I sprang up and threw open the door.

A sandy-haired young woman not much over her middle-twenties stood there, a package wrapped in a shawl pressed to her breast. She looked from one to the other of us out of candid blue eyes, her full lower lip trembling uncertainly, a slow flush mounting her cheeks toward the scattering of freckles that bridged her nose and swept under her eyes. Then, with that unerring intuition that women especially seem to have, she fixed upon Pons.

"Mr. Pons! I hope I'm not intruding. I had to come. I had to do something. Uncle will do nothing—just wait for whatever is to happen. Oh, it's dreadful, Mr. Pons, dreadful!"

"Do come in, Miss . . . ?"

"I am Flora Morland of Morland Park, Mr. Pons. You may have heard of my uncle—Colonel Burton Morland?"

"Retired Resident at Malacca," said Pons promptly. "But do compose yourself, Miss Morland. Let me take that box you're holding."

"No, no!" she cried, and pressed it momentarily closer to her body. Then she bit her lip and smiled weakly. "But that is why I came. Forgive me, Mr. Pons. You shall see for yourself—now."

Thereupon she threw back the shawl and revealed a box, scarcely as large as a cigar box, made of *kamuning* wood. It was beautifully carved on the top and around on all sides, with curious figures, like a bas-relief. It seemed obviously Oriental in design.

"Open it, Mr. Pons, do!" She shuddered a little. "Oh, I don't know how I could bear to have carried it all this way. I can't look again!"

Pons took the box gently from her. He pushed the breakfast dishes to one side and set the box on the table. He stood for a moment admiring its workmanship, while Miss Morland waited with an apprehensive tautness that was almost tangible in the room. Then he threw it open.

I fear I gasped. I do not know what I expected to see – a priceless jewel, perhaps? a bibliophile's treasure? something fitting to the exquisite box containing it. Certainly it was nothing I could have dreamed in my wildest imaginings! In the box lay a mummified human hand, severed at the wrist, affixed to the bottom of the box by two bands of white silk.

Pons's emotion showed only in his eyes, which lit up with quick interest. He touched the dried skin with the fingertips of one hand, while caressing the carved box with the other.

"Intarsia," murmured Pons. "An Italian art, Miss Morland. But this box would appear to be of Oriental origin; the subjects of the ornamentation are all Oriental. Would you care now to tell us how you came by it?"

He closed the box almost with regret, and, Miss Morland having taken the stuffed chair near the fireplace, came to stand against the mantel, filling his pipe with the detestable shag he smoked.

Miss Morland clasped her hands together. "I hardly know how to begin, Mr. Pons," she said.

"Let us start with this fascinating object you have brought us," suggested Pons.

"It was delivered to my uncle three days ago, Mr. Pons. I myself took it from the postman. It was sent first-class from Kuala Lumpur. My uncle was in his study that morning, and I took it in to him. I recall that his face darkened when he saw the package, but I supposed that it was only in wonder as to who might have sent it. It was ten years ago that he left Malaya. He looked for some clue as to its origin; there was no return address on the package. He began to take off its wrappings. I had turned away from him to put some books back on the shelves, when suddenly I heard him make a

kind of explosive sound, and on the instant he slipped from his chair to the floor. He had swooned dead away. I ran over to him of course, Mr. Pons—and that's how I came to see what was in the box. There was a little card, too—linen paper, I thought, Mr. Pons—I believe such details are important to you. On it was written in a flowing hand a single sentence: *I will come for you*."

"The card is not now in the box," said Pons.

"I suppose my uncle removed it. I closed the box, Mr. Pons—I couldn't bear to look at what was in it. Then I brought my uncle around. I expected him to tell me what was in the box and what it all meant, but he said nothing—never a word. Seeing that the box was closed, he assumed that he had closed it before or as he fainted, and that I didn't know what was in it. Mr. Pons, I was deeply shocked by what was in the box, but I was even more profoundly disturbed by my uncle's failure to say anything at all of it to me. Since the day he received it, furthermore, he has been very busy—and everything he has done is in the way of putting his affairs in order."

"Did your uncle notify the police?"

"If so, I don't know of it, Mr. Pons."

Pons puffed reflectively at his pipe for a moment before he asked, "I take it you are an orphan and have been living with your uncle. For how long?"

"Five years," she replied. "My mother died when I was very young, and my father five years after Uncle Burton returned from Malaya. He has been very kind to me. He has treated me as his own child."

"Your uncle is not married?"

"Uncle Burton was married at one time. I believe there was some cloud over the marriage. My father occasionally talked about my aunt in deprecatory terms—called her 'the Eurasian woman.' My cousin Nicholas, who spent the last five years of Uncle Burton's tenure with him in Malacca, also married a Eurasian woman. My aunt died before my uncle's return to England."

"Your cousin?"

"He returned with Uncle Burton. He's a barrister with chambers in town. His wife is the proprietress of a small—but I believe thriving—importing business in the Strand."

"Your cousin—Nicholas Morland, is it?"

"There were three brothers, Mr. Pons—my father, Nick's father, and Uncle Burton."



"Your cousin, I take it, was a member of your uncle's staff in Malacca?"

"Yes, Mr. Pons."

"How old is your uncle, Miss Morland?"

"Seventy."

"How long had he been the Resident in Malacca?"

"Fifteen years. He went out there when he was forty. I never really knew him, Mr. Pons, until his return. I hadn't been born when he was sent out. But Uncle Burton seemed to be very fond of me from the moment he saw me, and it seemed only natural that he would invite me to live with him when Father died. Uncle Burton is very wealthy, he has many servants, and, though he is regarded by some of them as a martinet, they do stay—most of them. And he has a large and secluded home in Chipping Barnet. It seemed the most natural thing to do—to live with him. He sent me to school, and put me through a small private college. For my part, I am expected to play hostess whenever he has one of his small parties, which are attended chiefly by my cousin and his wife and some other ex-Colonials and their wives. I rather like that now—I didn't at first. But my uncle is the soul of rectitude; he will tolerate no deviation from proper conduct—so there are never any social problems for me to deal with."

"Your uncle's heirs—who are they?"

Our client looked momentarily startled. "Why, I suppose Nick and I are his only heirs," she said. "I know nothing of his affairs, Mr. Pons. But there is no one else. All our relatives of my uncle's generation are dead, and Nick and I are the only ones of our generation. Nick has no children—so there is no coming generation, either." She took a deep breath and asked impulsively, "Mr. Pons—can you get to the bottom of this mystery? It troubles me very much to see Uncle Burton—well, preparing for death—that's what he's doing, Mr. Pons—it really is."

"Your uncle has no knowledge of your coming here, Miss Morland?"

"None. I left at dawn. He seldom rises before eight."

"Then you've not had breakfast, Miss Morland."

"No, Mr. Pons."

"Allow me!" Pons strode to the door, opened it, stuck his head out and called "Mrs. Johnson, if you please!" He turned back to our client. "Pray give me a few minutes to ponder your problem, Miss Morland. In the meantime, Mrs. Johnson will be happy to

prepare breakfast for you in her quarters. Will you not, Mrs. Johnson?" he asked of our long-suffering landlady as she appeared on the threshold.

"That I will, to be sure, Mr. Pons. If you'll come with me, Miss?"

Miss Morland, too surprised to protest, allowed herself to be led from the room by Mrs. Johnson.

The door had hardly closed behind them before Pons was once again at the box, opening it. I was drawn to his side.

"Is this not a unique warning indeed, Parker?" he asked.

"I have seldom seen anything as gruesome."

"It was intended to be. I submit that this severed hand must have a deep significance for our client's uncle. What do you make of it?"

I bent and peered closely at it, examining it as well as I could without disturbing it or removing it from the box. "A man's right hand," I said. "Of probably about forty, not much older, certainly. It is brown-skinned, not only from age. Eurasian?"

"Native. See how beautifully kept the nails are! This man did little work. There are no observable calluses. The hand is smooth even to the fingertips. How long would you say this hand has been severed?"

"Without more scientific apparatus, I should think it impossible to say."

"Could it be as old as, say, Colonel Morland's tenure in Malacca?"

"I should think so. But what could it mean to Morland?"

"Ah, Parker, when we can answer that question we will know why it was sent to him." He smiled grimly. "I fancy it concerns some dark episode of his past. He retired at fifty-five. Is that not early?"

"His health, perhaps, demanded his retirement."

"Or his conduct."

"Miss Morland speaks of him as a model of rectitude."

"And as something of a martinet. Conduct in search of rectitude may be as reprehensible as its opposite." He touched the silk bands.

"What do you make of these, Parker?"

"If I may venture a guess—white is the colour of mourning in the Orient," I said.

"The bands are new," observed Pons.

"That is certainly elementary," I could not help saying. "I can think of several reasons why they should be. What puzzles me is the reason for the existence of the hand in the first place."

"I submit its owner kept it as long as he lived."

"Well, that's reasonable," I agreed. "It has been properly mummified. Are we to take it that the owner is still alive?"

"If he were sufficiently attached to this appendage while he lived, would he so readily have sent it off?"

"Hardly."

"Unless it had a message to convey or an errand to perform."

"Absurd!"

"Yet it did convey a message to Colonel Morland. It may be gruesome, but surely not so much so as to cause a normal and healthy man to swoon at sight of it. It reminds me of that horrible little trifle of wizard lore known as the glory hand—the bewitched, animated hand of a dead man sent to perform its owner's wishes, even to murder."

"Superstitious claptrap!"

"Colonel Morland, at least, is convinced that his life is in danger, and that the threat to it emanates from Malaya. Let us just have a look at the ship's registry, before our client returns, to determine the number of ships that have docked from Malaya in the past few days."

We had time to search back five days before our client returned from Mrs. Johnson's quarters: during those five days no ship from Malaya had docked at England's ports, though a freighter, the *Alor Star*, was listed as due within twenty-four hours. At Miss Morland's entrance, Pons thrust the papers aside.

"Thank you, indeed, Mrs. Johnson," said Pons as our landlady turned at the threshold. "And now, Miss Morland, two or three questions occur to me. Pray be seated."

Our client, somewhat more composed and less uncertain in her manner, took her former seat and waited expectantly.

"Miss Morland, when your uncle came around, did he say or do anything significant?" asked Pons.

"He didn't say a word," she answered. "He was very pale. He looked for the box and seemed relieved to find it closed. He picked it up at once. I asked him, 'Are you all right, Uncle?' He said, 'Just a trifle dizzy. You run along.' I left him, but, of course, I did watch to be sure he would be all right. He hurried straight to his bedroom with this box. He hid it there, for when he came out again in a few moments, he no longer carried it. He then locked himself in his study, and within two hours his solicitor came, he could only have sent for him, because Mr. Harris would certainly not otherwise have come to call at that hour."

"You evidently found the intarsia box, Miss Morland."

"My uncle has in his bedroom only a cabinet, a bureau, and an old sea-chest which he fancied and which had accompanied him on his journeys. He served a short term in the Royal Navy as a young man, before entering the foreign service. He acquired the chest at that time. I knew that the box had to be in one of those three places, and I found it carefully covered up in the chest while my uncle was closeted with Mr. Harris. Last night, about eleven o'clock, after he went to sleep, I slipped in and took the box so that I might be ready to come to you without risk of waking Uncle Burton by taking the box this morning."

"Did your uncle mention the box to anyone?"

"I don't know, Mr. Pons. But I should think that if he had spoken of it to Mr. Harris, he would have shown it to him. Yet Uncle Burton never left the study while Mr. Harris was in the house; so he could not have done so."

"I see. I think, then, Miss Morland, our only recourse is to ask your uncle the questions you cannot answer."

Our client's hand flew to her lips; an expression of dismay appeared in her eyes. "Oh, Mr. Pons," she cried, "I'm afraid of what Uncle Burton might say."

"Miss Morland, I believe your uncle's life to be in great jeopardy. This belief he evidently shares. He can do no more than refuse to see us, and he can certainly not take umbrage at your attempt to be of service to him."

Her hand fell back to her lap. "Well, that's true," she decided.

Pons looked at the clock. "It is now nine. We can take the Underground and be at Watford Junction within the hour. Let us leave the box, if you please."

Our client sat for but a moment, undecided. Then, pressing her lips determinedly together, she got to her feet. "Very well, Mr. Pons. My uncle can do no worse than give me the back of his tongue!"

As we drew near to the home of Colonel Morland in the cab we had taken at Watford Junction, Pons's face grew more grim. "I fear we are too late, Miss Morland," he said presently.

"Oh, Mr. Pons! Why do you say so?" cried our client.

"No less than four police vehicles have passed us—two returning, two going our way," he answered. "I should be very much surprised not to find the police at Morland Park."

Miss Morland pressed a handkerchief to her lips.

Nor was Pons in error. Two police cars stood before the tall hedge that separated the park like grounds which our client indicated as her uncle's estate, and a constable stood on guard at the gate in the hedge.

"Too late," murmured Pons again at sight of him.

As the cab pulled up, the constable stepped forward to wave it away, then, his arm upraised, recognized Pons getting out. His arm dropped.

"Constable Russell," he introduced himself. "We met when I was stationed at Brixton, Mr. Pons." Then he caught sight of our client. "Could this be Miss Flora Morland?"

"It could be," said our client. "Please! Tell me what has happened?"

"Inspector Rogers of the Watford Police has been looking for you, Miss Morland. Please come with me."

"Never mind, Russell," interposed Pons. "We'll take her in."

"Very well, sir. Thank you, sir." He shook his head, frowning. "Dreadful business, sir, dreadful."

Our client stood for a moment, one hand on Pons's arm, trembling.

"I am afraid, Miss Morland," said Pons with unaccustomed gentleness, "that what your uncle feared has come to pass."

We went up a closely hedged walk arched over with trees to a classically Georgian country-house of three storeys. The front door was open to the warm summer morning; just inside it stood the portly figure of Inspector Rogers of the local police, talking with another constable. He turned abruptly at our entrance, frowning, until Pons had introduced us.

"Mr. Solar Pons, the private inquiry agent," he said heavily. "Do you smell these matters, sir?" Then his eyes fell upon our client. "Aha! Miss Flora Morland. We've been looking for you, Miss Morland."

"Please! What has happened?" she beseeched him.

"You don't know?"

"I do not."

"Colonel Morland was found murdered in his bed this morning," said Rogers coldly. "The house was locked, no window had been forced, and you were missing. I must ask you, Miss Morland, to come into the study with me."

"I should like to look into the bedroom, Inspector," said Pons.

"By all means. The photographer is there now, but he should be finished soon. Just down the hall, the third door on the left. Around the stairs."

Our client shot Pons a beseeching glance; he smiled reassuringly. Then she turned and went submissively with Inspector Rogers into the study, which was evidently on the right.

Pons pushed past the police photographer into the late Colonel Morland's bedroom. Before us lay a frightful scene. Colonel Morland—a tall, broad-chested man—lay outspread on his back on his bed, a wavy Malay *kris* driven almost to the hilt into his heart. Most shocking of all—his right hand had been severed at the wrist and lay where it had fallen in a pool of blood on the carpet beside the bed. Gouts of blood had spattered the bed, a froth of blood had welled from the dead man's lips to colour his thick moustache; and the wide staring eyes seemed still to wear an expression of the utmost horror.

The room all around was a shambles. Whoever had slain our client's uncle had torn it apart in search of something. The Colonel's traveling-chest lay open, its contents strewn about; the drawers of the bureau—save for the very smallest at the top—had been pulled open and emptied; and the contents of the tall wardrobe-cabinet, even to the uppermost shelves, were banked about the hassock that stood before it. The sight was almost enough to unnerve a stronger man than I, and I marveled at Pons's cool, keen detachment as he looked searchingly upon the scene.

The photographer, having finished, departed.

"How long would you say he has been dead, Parker?" asked Pons.

I stepped around gingerly and made a cursory examination. "At least eight hours," I said, presently. "I should put it at between midnight and two o'clock—not before, and not very long after."

"Before our client left the house," murmured Pons.

He stood for a moment where he was. Then he stepped carefully over to the bed and looked down at Colonel Morland's body.

"The *kris* does not appear to have been disturbed," he said, "which suggests that the murderer carried a second weapon solely for the purpose of severing his victim's hand."

"A ritual weapon!" I cried. "And carried away with him."

Pons smiled lightly. "Cut with a single sweeping stroke, very cleanly," he observed.

He stepped away from the bed and began to move carefully

among the objects strewn about, disturbing nothing. He went straight to the bureau, the top of which had evidently not been disturbed, for what I assumed to be the dead man's watch and wallet lay there. The wallet was the first object of Pons's attention; he picked it up and examined its contents.

"Twenty-seven pound-notes," he murmured.

"So the object of this search could hardly have been money," I said.

Pons shook his head impatiently. "No, no, Parker – the murderer was looking for the intarsia box. The top of the bureau was not disturbed because had it been there, the box would have been instantly apparent; nor have the top drawers been opened because they are not deep enough to hold the box."

He moved cautiously to the side of the bed, avoiding the pool of blood which had gushed from Colonel Morland's cleanly severed wrist. "The murderer must have stood just here," he said, and dropped to his knees to scrutinize the carpet intently. He was somewhat hampered by the presence of bloodstains, but I could see by the glint in his eyes that he had seen something of significance, however invisible it was to me, for he gave a small sound of satisfaction as he picked something from the carpet just back from the edge of the great bed and put it into two of the little envelopes he always carried.

Just as he rose from his position, Inspector Rogers came into the room, wearing a patent glow of confidence.

"Nasty little job here, Mr. Pons," he said almost cheerfully. "You'll be sorry to learn I've sent Miss Morland off to the station to be put through it."

"Indeed," said Pons. "What admirable and needlessly precipitate dispatch! You have reason to think her involved?"

"My dear fellow," said Rogers patronizingly. "Consider. Every window and door of this house was locked. Only four people had keys – Colonel Morland, whose key is on his ring; his valet – who was his body servant in Malacca and who discovered his body; the housekeeper, and Miss Morland. All their keys are in their possession. Nothing has been forced. Miss Morland, I am told by Mr. Harris, the Colonel's solicitor, stands to inherit sixty per cent of a considerable property – considerable even after the estate duties."

"It does not seem to you significant that on so warm a night this house should have been shut up so tightly?" asked Pons.

"You're not catching me out that way, Mr. Pons," retorted Rogers, grinning. "We know all about that intarsia box. Morland was in fear for his life."

"You are suggesting then that Miss Morland slipped into the room, stabbed her uncle, cut off his right hand, searched the room until she turned up the box, and then made her way to Number 7B to enlist my services?"

"Hardly that. She is hardly strong enough to have driven that *krus* into him with such force."

"Hardly," agreed Pons dryly.

"But there is nothing to prevent her having hired an accomplice."

"And what motive could she possibly have had for cutting off her uncle's hand?" pressed Pons.

"What better way could be devised to confuse the investigation into the motive for so gruesome a crime?"

"And Miss Morland seems to you, after your conversation with her, the kind of young lady who could lend herself to such a crime?"

"Come, come, Mr. Pons. You have a softness for a pretty face," said Rogers.

"I submit that this would have been a most fantastic rigmarole to go through simply to inherit the wealth of a man who, by all the evidence, granted her every whim. No, Rogers, it won't wash."

"That intarsia box — she tells me it is in your possession. We shall have to have it."

"Send to my London address for it. But give me at least today with it, will you?"

"I'll send for it tomorrow."

"Tell me — you've questioned the servants, I suppose? Did anyone hear anything in the night?"

"Not a sound. And I may say that the dog, which habitually sleeps at the front door of the house, outside, never once was heard to bark. I need hardly tell you the significance of that."

"It suggests that the murderer entered. . . ."

"Or was let in."

"By the back door."

Rogers's face reddened. He raised his voice. "It means that since the dog did nothing in the night-time the murderer was known to him."

Pons clucked sympathetically. "You ought to stay away from Sir

Arthur's stories, my dear chap. They have a tendency to vitiate your style."

"I suppose you will be telling us to look for a giant of a man who can charm dogs," said Rogers with heavy sarcasm.

"Quite the contrary. Look for a short, lithe man who, in this case at least, probably went barefooted." He turned and pointed to the low hassock. "Only a man shorter than average would have had to use that hassock to look at the top shelves of the cabinet. The indentations in the carpet indicate that the hassock's usual position is over against the wall beside the cabinet."

Rogers's glance flashed to the hassock, and returned, frowning, to Pons.

"If you don't mind, Inspector, I'll just have a look around out the back. Then perhaps you could send us to Watford Junction in one of the police cars."

"Certainly, Mr. Pons. Come along."

Rogers led the way out and around the stairs to a small area from which doors opened to the kitchen on the right, and a small store room on the left, and into the back yard. A maid and an elderly woman, manifestly the housekeeper, sat red-eyed at a table in the kitchen; Rogers hesitated, evidently of the opinion that Pons wished to speak with them, but Pons's interest was in the back door, where he crouched to look at the lock.

"We've been all through that, sir," said Rogers with an edge of impatience in his voice.

Pons ignored him. He opened the door, crouched to examine the step, then dropped to his knees and, on all fours, crawled out to the recently reset flagstone walk beyond it. From one place he took up a pinch of soil and dropped it into one of his envelopes. At another he pointed wordlessly, beckoning to the Inspector, who came and saw the unmistakable print of human toes.

Then he sprang up and went back into the house. Rogers and myself at his heels. He found a telephone directory, consulted it briefly, and announced that he was ready to leave, if Rogers would be kind enough to lend us a police car and driver.

Once again on the train, I asked Pons, "We're not going back to 7B?"

"No, Parker. I am delighted to observe how well you read me. I daresay we ought to lose no time discovering the secret of the intarsia box. Since Colonel Morland is dead, we shall have to ask Nicholas Morland whether he can explain it. You'll recall that he

spent the last five years of his uncle's Residency with him. He has chambers in the Temple. I took the trouble to look him up in the directory before we left Morland Park."

"I followed the matter of the murderer's height readily enough," I said, "but how did you arrive at his being barefooted?"

"There were in the carpet beside the bed, just where a man might have stood to deliver the death blow, three tiny groups of soil particles, in such a position as to suggest the imprint of toes. The soil was quite probably picked up among the flagstones."

"And, you know, Pons—Rogers has a point about the dog."

Pons smiled enigmatically. "The dog did nothing. Very well. Either he knew the murderer—or he didn't hear him, which is quite as likely. A barefooted man could travel with singular noiselessness. And Morland Park is a paradise for prowlers!" He looked at me, his eyes dancing. "Consider the severed hand. Since you are so busy making deductions, perhaps you have accounted for it."

"Now you press me," I admitted, "that seems to me the most elementary detail of all. I suggest that an atrocity the late Colonel Morland committed in the past has now been visited upon him."

"Capital! Capital!" cried Pons. "You have only to keep this up, my dear fellow, and I can begin to think of retiring."

"You are making sport of me!" I protested.

"On the contrary. I could not agree with you more. There are one or two little points about the matter that trouble me, but I have no doubt these will be resolved in due time."

For the rest of the journey Pons sat in silent contemplation, his eyes closed, the thumb and forefinger of his right hand ceaselessly caressing the lobe of his ear. He did not open his eyes again until we changed at Charing Cross for Temple.

Nicholas Morland proved to be a somewhat frosty man in his early forties. He was dressed conservatively, but in clothes befitting his station. Save for the difference in years, he was not unlike his late uncle in appearance—with the same kind of moustache, the same outward thrust of the lips, the same bushy brows. His frosty mien was superficial, for it collapsed as he listened to Pons's concise summary of events, and little beads of perspiration appeared at his temples.

"We must rely upon you, Mr. Morland," concluded Pons, "to explain the significance of the intarsia box and its contents."

Morland came shakily to his feet and walked back and forth

across his office, biting his lip. "It is something I had hoped never to have to speak about," he said at last. "Is it really necessary, Mr. Pons?"

"I assure you it is. The police will expect to hear about it before the day is out. I am here in advance of their coming because I am acting in the interests of your cousin."

"Of course. I quite understand."

He took another turn or two about his office, and then sat down again, dabbing at his forehead with a handkerchief.

"Well, Mr. Pons, it is a matter that does not reflect at all well upon my late uncle," he began. "As Flora may perhaps have told you, Uncle Burton married a Eurasian woman—a very fine, very beautiful woman some ten years his junior—perhaps as much as fifteen. I cannot be sure, though I suspect my wife would know. I am sure you are aware that matters of moral conduct among the ethnically mixed peoples of the Federated States of Malaya are considered lax by British standards, and perhaps it was true that my aunt engaged in improper conduct with Bendarloh Ali—an uncle of my wife's, who belonged to one of the best native families in Malacca. My uncle thought he would lose face, and he set about to prevent it. My aunt died—there is some reason to believe that it was by poison at my uncle's hands. Her lover was arrested—some valuable items belonging to my uncle were found at his house—he was accused of having stolen them, on no stronger evidence than their presence in his home—and he suffered the barbarous practise of having his right hand cut off at the wrist. That is the sum total of the matter, sir."

"How long ago did this happen, Mr. Morland?"

"Only a month or two before he was sent home. The Sultan of Malacca was outraged—though he had approved the punishment—he was later led to repudiate it—and demanded the recall of the Resident. The Governor really had no alternative but to relieve my uncle of his post."

"Over fifteen years, then. Does it seem likely that he would wait so long to take vengeance?"

"Not he, Mr. Pons. My uncle's victim died three months ago. I think it not inconsistent of the Malay character that his son might believe it incumbent upon him to avenge the honour of his house and the indignity done his father."

"I submit it would be an unnatural son who would separate his father's right hand from his remains," said Pons.

Morland shook his head thoughtfully. "Mr. Pons, I would tend to agree. There is this point to consider - the hand sent my uncle may *not* have been Bendarloh Ali's. Even if it were, I suppose the family represents that ethnic mixture so common in Malacca that no standard of conduct consistent with ancient Malay customs could be ascribed to it."

Pons sat for a few moments in contemplative silence. Then he said, "You are very probably aware that you and your cousin will share your uncle's estate."

"Oh, yes. There is no one else. We are a small family, and unless Flora marries, we will very likely die out entirely. Oh, there are distant cousins - but we have not been in touch for many years." He shrugged. "But it's a matter of indifference to me. My practise is quite sufficient for our needs - though I suppose my wife can find a use for what Uncle Burton may leave us, what with the constant innovations at her shop."

The telephone rang suddenly at Morland's elbow. He lifted it to his ear, said, "Morland here," and listened. When he put it down after but a brief period, he said, "Gentlemen, the police are on their way."

Pons got to his feet with alacrity. "One more question, Mr. Morland. Your relations with your uncle - were they friendly, tolerable, distant?"

"The three of us had dinner at Morland Park once a month, Mr. Pons," said Morland a little stiffly.

"Three?"

"My wife's cousin lives with us. Uncle Burton naturally would not exclude him."

"Thank you, sir."

We took our leave.

Outside, Pons strode purposefully along, some destination in mind, his eyes fixed upon an inner landscape. Within a few minutes we were once more on the Underground, and rode in silence unbroken by any word from Pons, until we reached Trafalgar Square and emerged to walk in the Strand.

"Pons," I cried finally, exasperated at his silence. "It's noon. What are we doing here?"

"Ah, patience, Parker, patience. The Strand is one of the most fascinating areas in the world. I mean to idle a bit and shop."

Within half an hour, Pons had exchanged his deerstalker for a conservative summer hat, leaving the former to be dispatched to

our quarters by post; he had bought a light summer coat, which he carried loosely on his arm; and he had added a walking-stick to his ensemble all to my open-mouthed astonishment. He presented quite a different picture from that to which I had become accustomed in the years I had shared his quarters, and he offered no explanation of his purchases.

We continued along the Strand until we came to a small shop modestly proclaiming that antiques and objets d'art were available within.

"Ah, here we are," said Pons. "I beg you, Parker, keep your face frozen. You have an unhappy tendency to show your reactions on it."

So saying, he went into the shop.

A bell, tinkling in a back room, brought out a dapper, brown-skinned man of indeterminate age; he came up to us and bowed. He looked little older than a boy, but he was not a boy. He smiled, flashing his white teeth, and said, "If it please you, gentlemen—I am here to serve you."

"Are you the proprietor?" asked Pons abruptly.

"No, sir. I am Ahmad. I work for Mrs. Morland."

"I am looking," said Pons, "for an intarsia box."

"Ah. Of any precise size?"

"Oh, so—and so," said Pons, describing the size of the intarsia box Miss Morland had brought to our quarters.

"Just so. One moment, if you please."

He vanished into the room at the rear, but came out in a very few moments carrying an intarsia box, which he offered to Pons.

"Seventeenth century Italian, sir. Genuine. I trust this is the box you would like."

"It is certainly exquisite work," said Pons. "But, no, it is not quite what I would like. The size is right. But I would like something with Oriental ornamentation."

"Sir, there are no antique intarsia boxes of Oriental manufacture," said Ahmad. "I am sorry."

"I'm not looking for an antique," said Pons. "I am, of course, aware that intarsia boxes were not made in the Orient before the eighteenth century."

Ahmad's pleasant face brightened. "Ah, in that case, sir, I may have something for you."

He vanished once more into the quarters at the rear of the shop.

When he came out this time he carried another intarsia box

With a triumphant smile, he gave it to Pons. Then he stood back to wait upon Pons's verdict.

Pons turned it over, examining it critically. He opened it, smelled it, caressed it with his fingers, and smiled. "Excellent!" he cried. "This will do very well, young man. What is its price?"

"Ten pounds, sir."

Pons paid for it without hesitation. "Pray wrap it with care. I should not like any of that beautifully wrought carving to be damaged—even scratched."

Ahmad beamed. "Sir, you like the intarsia?"

"Young man, I have some knowledge of these things," said Pons almost pontifically. "This is among the finest work of its kind I have seen."

Ahmad backed away from Pons, bowing, his face glowing. He retired once again into the back room, from which presently came the sounds of rustling paper. In just under five minutes Ahmad reappeared and placed the carefully wrapped intarsia box in Pons's hands. He was still glowing with pleasure. Moreover, he had the air of bursting with something he wanted to say, which only decorum prevented his giving voice.

Pons strolled leisurely from the shop and away down the street. But, once out of sight of the shop, he moved with alacrity to hail a cab and gave the driver our Praed Street address.

"Did you not have the feeling that Ahmad wished to tell us something?" I asked when we were on our way.

"Ah, he told us everything," said Pons, his eyes glinting with good humour. "Ahmad is an artist in intarsia. I trust you observed the costly antiques offered in Mrs. Morland's shop?"

"I did indeed."

"It suggested nothing to you?"

"That her business is thriving, as Miss Morland told us," I reached over and tapped the package Pons held. "Did it not seem to you that this box is very much like Miss Morland's?"

Pons smiled. "Once the first box is turned out, the pattern is made. The rest come with comparative ease. They are probably identical, not only with each other, but with a score or more of others."

Back in our quarters, Pons carefully unwrapped the intarsia box he had bought and placed it beside our client's. Except for the fact that there was some difference in age between them, they were

virtually identical. Pons examined the boxes with singular attention to detail, finding each smallest variation between them.

"Are they identical or not?" I asked finally.

"Not precisely. The box Miss Morland brought us is at least seventy-five years old; it may be a hundred. It is made of the same beautiful *kamuning* wood out of which the Malays fashion the hilts of their weapons. I trust you observed that the handle of the *kris* which killed Colonel Morland was of this same wood. It has been polished many times and waxed; there is actually some visible wearing away of the wood. The other is a copy of a box like this, made by a skilled artist. I suppose there is a demand for objects of this kind and I have no doubt they are to be had in all the shops which have imported pieces from the Orient for sale. Chinese boxes like this are most frequently in metal or ceramic; wood is more commonly in use from Japan down the coast throughout the Polynesians and Melanesians in the South Pacific." He dismissed the intarsia boxes with a gesture. "But now, let us see what we have from the late Colonel Morland's bedroom."

He crossed to the corner where he kept his chemistry apparatus and settled himself to examine the contents of the envelopes he had used at Morland Park. There were but three of them, and it was unlikely that they would occupy him for long. Since I had a professional call to make at two o'clock, I excused myself.

When I returned within the hour, I found Pons waiting expectantly.

"Ah, Parker," he cried, "I trust you are free for the remainder of the afternoon. I am expecting Inspector Rogers and together we may be able to put an end to the police harassment of our client."

"Did you learn anything from the slides?" I asked.

"Only confirmation of what I suspected. The particles of soil I found on the carpet beside the bed were identical with the soil around the flagstones, even to grains of limestone, of which the flagstones are made. There seems to be no doubt but that the soil was carried into the house by the bare toes of the murderer. Other than that, there was also just under the edge of the bed a tiny shaving of camphor wood which is also commonly used by the Malays who work the jungle produce of that country."

"We are still tied to Colonel Morland's past," I said.

"We have never strayed from it," said Pons shortly. "But thus far in the course of the inquiry unless the police have turned up fingerprints on the handle of the *kris* we have only presumptive,

not convicting evidence. It is all very well to know the identity of the murderer; the trick is to convict him. Ah, I hear a motor slowing down—that will be Rogers."

Within a few moments a car door slammed below, and Rogers's heavy tread on the stairs fell to ear.

The Inspector came into our quarters gingerly carrying a small package, which he surrendered to Pons with some relief. "Here it is, Mr. Pons," he said. "I had a little trouble getting the loan of it."

"Capital!" cried Pons. He took the package and carried it to the intarsia box he had bought in the shop in the Strand. "I don't suppose you're armed, Rogers?"

"You know we don't normally carry firearms," began Rogers ponderously.

"Yes, yes, I know," said Pons. "Parker, get my revolver."

I went into the bedroom and found Pons's weapon where he had last carelessly laid it down—on the bureau.

"Give it to Rogers, will you?"

"I don't know what you're up to, Mr. Pons," said Rogers, with some obvious misgiving on his ruddy face. "P'raps that young woman's turned your head."

The contents of the Inspector's package had vanished into the intarsia box, which Pons now took up, having resumed the garb he had bought in the Strand shops.

"Let us be off. I want to try an experiment, Rogers—frankly, it is no more than that. It may succeed. It may not. We shall see."

Our destination was the antique and imports shop in the Strand, and all the way there Pons said nothing, only listened with a sardonic smile on his hawk-like features to the Inspector's weighty discourse on the damning circumstances which made our client seem guilty of arranging her uncle's death.

As the police car approached the shop, Pons spoke for the first time to the constable at the wheel. "Either stop short of the shop or drive past it."

The driver obediently stopped beyond the shop.

"Now, Inspector," said Pons brusquely, as we got out of the car. "hand on gun, and pray be ready. Try to look a little less like a policeman, that's a good fellow."

Pons led the way into the shop, carrying the carefully wrapped intarsia box he had bought only a few hours previously. An extraordinarily handsome Eurasian woman came forward to wait

upon him. She was of indeterminate age; she could have been anywhere between twenty and forty, but certainly did not seem over thirty.

"What can I do for you, gentlemen?"

"The young man who waited on me this noon," said Pons, unwrapping the intarsia box as he spoke. "Is he here?"

She nodded, raised her voice to call, "Ahmad!" and stepped back.

Ahmad came out, a look of polite inquiry on his face. He recognized Pons as his noon hour customer; his eyes fell to the box.

"Sir! You are disappointed?"

"In the beauty of the box, no," said Pons. "But the interior!"

Ahmad stepped lightly forward and took the box, discarding the wrappings. "We shall see," he said, bowing almost obsequiously.

Then he opened the intarsia box.

Instantly, a dramatic and frightening metamorphosis took place. Ahmad's smiling face altered grotesquely; its mask of politeness washed away to reveal dark murderous features, suffused with sudden rage and fear. He dropped the intarsia box—and from it rolled the severed hand of Colonel Burton Morland! Simultaneously, he leaped backward with a feline movement, tore down from the wall behind him a scimitar-like *chenangka*, and turned threateningly upon Pons.

For scarcely a moment the scene held. Then Mrs. Morland began to waver, and I sprang forward to catch her as she fainted. At the same moment, Inspector Rogers reacted and drew his gun upon Ahmad.

"My compliments, Inspector," said Pons. "You've just taken the murderer of Colonel Morland. I think," he added blandly, "if I were you I should take Mrs. Nicholas Morland along and question her about the profit motive in the death of her husband's uncle. I believe it almost certain that hers was the brain in which this devilish crime was conceived. Is the lady coming around, Parker?"

"In a few moments," I said.

"Call my driver," said Rogers, finding his voice.

Pons stepped into the street and shouted for the constable.

"It was not alone the fact that no ship had docked recently from Malaya that made an avenger from the Orient unlikely," said Pons as we traveled back to Praed Street on the Underground, "but the same aspect of the matter that so impressed Rogers—the murderer

clearly had prior knowledge of Morland Park, something no newly arrived foreigner could have had, and he must have been someone who had ample opportunity to take an impression of the back-door key, since he would prefer to enter by that door not guarded by the dog. Nothing in that house was disturbed, save Colonel Morland's room; not a sound aroused anyone throughout the entry into the house and the commission of the crime.

"Yet it was evident that the murderer also had knowledge of the mutilation suffered by Bendarloh Ali. Miss Morland had no such knowledge. Her cousin Nicholas had. Presumably, since his wife was of Bendarloh Ali's family, and had been in Malacca at the time Ali was so brutally punished, she knew as much as her husband. It is not too much to conclude that her cousin—who was therefore also of Bendarloh Ali's family—knew the circumstances as well. Ahmad, of course, is that cousin. Ahmad had been as frequent a visitor at Morland Park as his employer; he knew the grounds and the house. The shaving of camphor wood—as much a product of Malaya as *kamuning* wood—places Ahmad indisputably in the late Colonel Morland's bedroom.

"Manifestly, the preparations were made with great care. Mrs. Morland directed her relatives to send the hand of Bendarloh Ali to Colonel Morland in the intarsia box which she forwarded to Malaya for that purpose. That the box had served as a model for Ahmad's carefully wrought imitations did not seem to her important, since Ahmad had been instructed to bring the box back from Morland Park. Ahmad undoubtedly killed Colonel Morland to avenge the family honour after Bendarloh Ali died—but I think it inescapable that his desire for vengeance was planted and carefully nourished by Mrs. Nicholas Morland, whose real motive was not vengeance, but the control of the unlimited funds which would be at her disposal when her husband came into his share of his uncle's estate.

"One of our most sanguinary cases, Parker. And though we have taken the murderer, I suspect that the real criminal will go free to enjoy the expansion of her shop according to her plan. It is one of life's little ironies."

The Adventure of the Six Silver Spiders

PERHAPS one of the attitudes in which I have seen my friend Solar Pons most often is that of poring over a book or studying the agony columns of the daily papers, a broadside or something from his extensive files, the keen, dark eyes intent under their full brows, the thin lips pressed together, the almost feral face grim, presenting nothing so much as the aspect of a bloodhound on the scent. It was thus I found him late one afternoon in October early in the fourth decade of this century, when I came in out of a dense white fog that lay especially heavy along Praed Street.

Pons's dark eyes flashed up from and back to the object of his scrutiny. "You came by Underground, I see," he observed.

"I suppose my turn-ups reveal traces of dust," I replied with some asperity.

"Nothing so unlikely, my dear Parker, but quite as elementary. You are too wet to have taken a cab, and not wet enough to have walked very far. Paddington Station is near enough to account for the degree of moisture."

By this time I had removed my overcoat and hat; I had unbuttoned my waistcoat and taken my place at the table.

"Mrs. Johnson will have supper soon," Pons continued, in leaning back now. "Tell me, what do you make of this, Parker?"

The object he handed me was clearly a leaflet or small brochure issued by a book-seller.

"A request for bids on the private library of Paul Guillaume, Comte d'Erlette," I read, opening it to glance at the statements which preceded the listing of books. Pons said nothing, but his sharp eyes were fixed on me not without a glint of humour. I read the dignified announcement. "Mr. John Amworthy, having acquired the private library of occult literature formerly the possession of the Comte d'Erlette of Erlette, near Voyonnes, France, will dispose of it to the highest bidder on the 13th September. Bids are to be sealed and sent to Mr. Amworthy in care of the Boar's Head Book Shop, 17 Princes Street, Edinburgh, Scotland. All bids will be opened in the presence of bidders or their duly accredited representatives at three o'clock on the afternoon of 13th September.

on the premises of the Boar's Head Book Shop." There followed an account of the death of the collector and former owner, together with a statement explaining Mr. Amworthy's fortunate possession of the rare volumes "herein described."

"There is surely nothing extraordinary about this," I said.

"Pray examine it."

Somewhat nettled at his determination, I turned to the titles listed, and dutifully read through the first entry. "Al Hazred, Abdul: *Necronomicon* Tr. from the Arabic into Latin by Olaus Wormius. With several woodcut tables of signs and mystic symbols. Madrid, 1647. Small folio, full calf with ornamental overall stamping in blind, including date, 1715. Binding somewhat stained and rubbed. There is a slight foxing, but only in first ten pages. In fine condition, and one of only six known copies of the first Latin edition. Only copies known to be in existence are in the Bibliothèque Nationale of Paris, the Widener Library at Harvard, and Miskatonic University Library at Arkham, Massachusetts, U.S.A. Only privately owned copy known to have been in existence disappeared from the library of the Massachusetts artist, R. U. Pickman. Only two copies in Arabic known to have existed. According to von Junzt in *Unaussprechlichen Kulten* (see number 17, page four this catalogue), 'es steht ausser Zweifel, dass dieses Buch ist die Grundlage der Okkulteliteratur.'"

I glanced at several of the other titles listed: d'Erlette, Paul Henri, Comte de: *Cultes des Goules*, Rouen, 1737; Prinn, Ludvig: *De Vermis Mysteriis*, Prague, 1807; *Liber Itonus* (Author Unknown), Rome, 1662; all manifestly occult literature. The four-page brochure was printed in singularly good taste, with the appearance of being set by hand. Some of the books were described in the most minute detail, and many were "with a lock" of silver gilt or gold. In all there were but twenty-seven items, and only two of them were represented at all in private libraries; while many of the rare books listed were believed to be only copies. For the library intact, explained a concluding notice, no bid under two thousand pounds would be accepted.

"It seems to be an extremely rare, possibly unique collection," I said at last, with that caution which comes of experience.

"It does indeed. It suggests nothing to you?" asked Pons with that sometimes irritating insistence which indicated that he was aware of information I did not have.

"Nothing, except that only a wealthy collector could afford to bid on the collection intact."

"So much is evident," agreed Pons. "Have you ever heard of the library of the Count de Fortsas?"

I confessed my ignorance of it.

"Some ninety years ago a sixteen-page pamphlet-catalogue of the exceedingly rare books in the library of Jean Népomucène-August Pichauld, Comte de Fortsas, were offered for sale at Binche. The catalogue was printed at Mons, and was sent out to collectors in several countries. It excited bibliophiles in England as well as on the Continent; bids came in to the printer at Mons, who had issued the catalogue. So did collectors; on the day of the sale in August 1840, there were so many strangers in Binche that the gravest suspicions were aroused among the police, who thought these curious-looking characters might be dangerous fellows planning an *émeute*. But, my dear Parker, there was no such library, and there were no such books, there was, in fact, not even a Comte de Fortsas; all existed only in the brilliant imagination of a certain antiquarian, M. Renier Chalon, who wrote books on numismatics and had a fancy to amuse himself at the expense of his fellow bibliophiles."

I took up the pamphlet again. "Pons, you cannot mean . . . ?" I cried.

"Indeed," said Pons, smiling, "but I fear such is the case. All these books have a precarious existence only in the writings of certain minor authors of American origin, all apparently followers, in a remote sense, of the work of Edgar Allan Poe. The catalogue is, in short, a hoax."

"But the Count d'Erlette?" I protested.

"Erlette is a provincial name in France. The family existed in some numbers before the Revolution, but the last member to carry a title died in 1919. The Boar's Head Book Shop is real enough, but clearly only an accommodation address. I fancy we are dealing with a gentleman of extraordinary cunning, who is not unwilling to take the greatest pains to achieve his end."

"And what is that?"

"That is the problem, Parker. We shall hope to elucidate it." He tapped the catalogue. "This was sent over by messenger in mid-afternoon by Baron Elouard de Baseuil. I expect him immediately after supper. And here, if I am not mistaken, is Mrs. Johnson with our supper. Come in, come in, Mrs. Johnson: Parker and I are famished."

Our long-suffering landlady bustled in as he spoke, murmuring plaintively that someone had better induce Pons to eat or he would waste away to a shadow. "Always studying, always puzzling things

out, and always forgetting to eat. This lamb is stewed in white wine," she ended with emphasis.

"Ah, my dear Mr. Johnson," said Pons, drawing the lamb toward him, "in these rooms it is more than customarily true that, as the French have it, *'De la main à la bouche, se perd souvent la soupe.'*"

"That lamb won't be lost, Mr. Pons," said Mrs. Johnson, and, sighing, left us to our supper.

The dishes had just been removed when our visitor arrived.

"A man of decision, impatient, and at the moment in haste," said Pons, listening to the steps on the stairs.

Mrs. Johnson ushered in a gentleman in evening-dress. He was a tall, imposing man, with a square face on which he wore a Vandyke and a monocle over one of his clear blue eyes. His beard was streaked with grey, as was the hair of his head, for he carried his opera-hat in his one hand, and his stick in the other.

"I have the honour to address Mr. Solar Pons?" he said, looking unerringly at my companion.

"Pray sit down, Baron de Baseuil. Dr. Parker is eminently trustworthy."

The Baron acknowledged the introduction with a formal bow. He sat down. His eye had caught sight of the catalogue, which had reappeared on the table after Mrs. Johnson had removed the supper dishes, and he now indicated it with his stick.

"You have had opportunity to examine this, Mr. Pons?"

"I have. I perceive it is an elaborately conceived and skillfully executed hoax. But do let us hear your story, for it is evident that you are on the way to an engagement for the evening."

"Mr. Pons, it is simply told," began the Baron with animation. "Six of us responded to the lure. I myself journeyed to Edinburgh. So did Colonel David Wade, Sir Austin Mannell, Kester Roxbrugh, and representatives of Lady Monica Jevrons and Alan Thomason. We arrived at the Boar's Head Book Shop only to find a message awaiting us, telling us that the entire collection had been bought by a barrister representing an heir to the estate of the late Count. You will have observed the resemblance to the Fortsas hoax. I regret to say that we did not do so until then. The books listed, you see, have a certain kind of spurious existence in the writings of little known American and British writers, and the fact is that the books have been held by some readers to be real volumes. In the case of the title which heads the list, every reputed fact supposedly 'known'

about this rare volume has been skillfully added to the customary data one always finds in descriptions of books up for sale to make the paragraph, thus lending it still more superficial reality. Mr. Pons, I am not a man to be hoaxed. I want to know the identity of the man behind this charade."

Pons sat now with his eyes closed and his chin resting on one hand. Without opening his eyes, he asked, "And the owner of the Boar's Head? Presumably you questioned him?"

"Of course," replied the Baron. "All arrangements had been made with him by post. He was promised that the books would be brought in just before the hour of the sale on the thirteenth. A handsome retainer was sent to him with the initial letter from Mr. Amworthy, who is doubtless as fictitious as his catalogue."

"In name only," said Pons. "Was there no occasion to make inquiry by post?"

"None. The catalogue, as you see, is explicit."

"I have read it, yes. And your fellow bibliophiles—you did not think it strange that only six were represented?"

"Mr. Pons, we are the best-known collectors of occult lore in the British Isles, and our collections are the most extensive."

"You went up by train and returned when?"

"The following day. We had anticipated that some time would be lost in the opening of the bids and the disposal of the books. All but Colonel Wade had engaged rooms, and he followed suit after he reached Edinburgh."

"So you were out of London, then, for most of two days and a night?"

"That is correct."

Pons meditated for a moment. Then he said, "I fancy this little matter holds promise of an entertaining chase, Baron. Will you be so kind as to set down immediately an order permitting me to examine your collection?"

"I will be at home in the morning, Mr. Pons."

"We have already lost three weeks, sir. I propose to begin tonight."

Baron de Baseuil came to his feet. "Very well, Mr. Pons. Permit me to excuse myself so that I can take leave of my host for the evening. I will be at your service in an hour at my home in Portman Square."

He took his departure, and at once Pons flung aside his casual air.

He went swiftly to his shelf of references and came back to the

table with a slender book entitled *The British Bibliophile*. "We should be able to find our client in this little work," he murmured, as he leafed through the pages. "Ah, here we are!" He flattened the book out under the lamp and stood above it, hands flat on the table, looking like a great bird of prey as he read.

"'de Baseuil . . . born August 21, 1871: Paris. Son of former consular official in London. British citizen since 1912.' Hm! this is primarily biographical. Let us see. Ah, here is a paragraph pertinent to his collecting activities. 'Possesses one of largest private libraries in England. Specializes in occult literature, esoterica, books relating to ancient civilizations. Fine collection of miniature books, including one of the six spiders of the forger, Yeovil. Some fine bindings, calf, vellum, and so forth. Also interested in all incunabula (before 1650) -subject immaterial. Value of library estimated at £40,000.' "

"Not particularly informative except to a collector," I said.

"You caught nothing of interest?" asked Pons as he jotted down a few notes from the book.

"Not particularly."

"Nothing which ought to have occurred to you as uncommon?"

"No," I retorted.

"I submit to you it is not just a coincidence that the number 'six' should occur twice within so short a time. Our client informed us that only six collectors were represented at the sale; I submit that each of the others he mentioned is likewise the owner of one of the six spiders of the forger, Yeovil."

Pons replaced the book.

"What the devil are 'spiders' doing in a book collection?"

"Ah, my dear Parker, they have an honoured niche. Yeovil was a forger of no mean ability. He forged not only sovereigns and guineas, but also books and works of art. The six silver spiders—they are actually scarabs—are hollow and each contains part of a chapter from the *Book of the Dead*, in miniature book form, supposedly written by an Egyptian priest of the time of Amenhotep. One of Yeovil's most skillful forgeries."

"They have a certain value then?"

Pons shook his head. "Only as curiosa. They are hardly worth stealing, if you are contemplating their theft as a possible motive."

"What about this fellow, Yeovil?" I asked then.

Pons was already divesting himself of his dressing-gown and eyeing his Inverness. "It would not be an exaggeration to look upon

him as one of the most fascinating figures in the entire annals of British crime. I fancy he is somewhat before your time, Parker - he has been in Dartmoor for the past two decades, and must be an old man now. Had it not been for his impetuous murder of a police-officer in the attempt to take him, he might well be a free man today. He was without doubt one of the most skilled forgers in history, with a talent that permitted him to enter many fields. He might have been a great artist, had he not chosen a career of crime instead. Many of his effects were never recovered, but his forgeries have never been duplicated since his time, which is fortunate since his guineas and sovereigns particularly were almost flawless and very difficult to detect. Inspector Jamison had occasion to mention him only a few months ago; copies of Yeovil's correspondence are carefully examined by experts at the Yard, where they have not given up hope of recovering the rest of his effects. But come, let us be on our way."

Since the distance from our lodgings to Portman Square was not great, Pons elected to walk by way of Edgware Road and Upper Berkeley Street. "There is a sense of adventurous expectancy about a London fog," he often said. "One can expect anything to come out of it." But tonight he walked in silence, deep in thought. His long, imposing stride, his slightly open Inverness, his height all lent him an impressiveness which was manifestly felt by passers-by, who instinctively swerved aside on meeting us. He walked, indeed, like a solitary pedestrian whose kinship with the fog swirling around us was several degrees more substantial than any relationship he might have had with his companion.

Our client awaited us at his sumptuous dwelling. He was still in evening clothes and had obviously not long preceded us. He had given instructions that we be shown to the library where he kept his collection of books, and we found him there, standing with hands folded behind him, dignified despite an air of impatience.

"I am at your service, Mr. Pons. What can I show you first?" he asked.

"I fear I may disappoint you, Baron," replied Pons. "But I have a fancy to see the silver spider miniature of the forger, Yeovil."

"By all means, sir." He favoured Pons with a curious and surprised glance, but asked no question.

Baron de Baseuil walked to a nearby case, opened it, and took out a little box of the kind in which jewelry is kept. He opened it and turned it toward us. Cushioned inside lay an exquisitely

wrought silver scarab which, save for its unusual bulk, looked almost genuinely alive.

"The miniature, of course, is inside," said the Baron. "Pray examine it at your leisure."

Pons took the scarab and turned it over, disclosing a tiny door. Under our client's eyes, Pons opened the little door.

The scarab was empty.

A cry of mingled anger and shock escaped Baron de Baseuil. He took the silver container from Pons's fingers, his hand trembling; he turned it over, examining it from all sides. Then he cast an apprehensive glance toward the remainder of his treasures.

"Do not alarm yourself, Baron," said Pons softly. "I daresay this is the only object which has been stolen."

"Sir, I have been informed of your powers," said the Baron. "How did you guess?"

Pons smiled enigmatically. "Surely it was obvious that the elaborate hoax of the Boar's Head catalogue was perpetrated for the purpose of taking you sufficiently far from London so that someone might have access to your collection, Baron. Six of you were present or represented at the sale; there are in existence six of Yeovil's miniature forgeries. I dislike to believe in coincidence, Baron. The deduction is almost inevitable that your companion dupes were very probably the only other persons to receive the spurious catalogue and that they, like yourself, possess one of Yeovil's silver pieces."

"It is true, we own the six spiders among us," said Baron de Baseuil thoughtfully. "But, of course, it is really absurdly simple, now you explain it. Yet there is little reason for having taken this; it has no great value."

"As to that, we shall see. Let us discover what manner of man we have to deal with."

The Baron rang for his man-servant, who came with commendable promptness. He was a gaunt individual, slightly stooped, and already well along in years. His dignified correctness suggested long service.

"Bateman, on one of the days I was in Scotland, someone called," said the Baron. "Who was it?"

"No one called but Mr. Wootyn, the appraiser from Sotheby's."

"What did he want?"

"He said he had come in response to your request to appraise several small pieces in the collection, sir. He was here perhaps ten

minutes, and said that he would write to you in a few days. I assumed he had done so. I did not leave him out of my sight, sir."

The Baron held up the silver scarab. "Did he examine this, Bateman?"

"Yes, sir, I believe he did."

"The miniature could be abstracted easily," observed Pons. "It would require but a slight manual dexterity."

"Is anything wrong, sir?" asked Bateman anxiously.

"Telephone Wootyn at his home. I'll speak to him from here."

"Very good, sir." He left the room.

"This is amazing, Mr. Pons," said Baron de Baseuil. "I have known Wootyn for twenty years."

"I take it you did not instruct him to make an appraisal for you. I'm afraid you will discover that Mr. Wootyn made no call here last month."

The telephone rang; Baron de Baseuil reached for it at once. Our client spoke but a few minutes to ascertain that Pons was indeed correct. Mr. Wootyn had not called at the house in Portman Square since April.

"I cannot understand it," muttered the Baron, as he turned from the instrument. "The miniature has no great value."

"We are dealing with an exceedingly clever man, Baron. He has apparently familiarized himself sufficiently with your habits to have succeeded in impersonating Wootyn so cleverly as to deceive Bateman. I rather think there is no time to be lost, if we are not already too late. I must have sight of the remaining miniatures without delay if any do remain. I recall their owners and took the trouble to jot down their addresses before I left Praed Street. Lady Monica Jevrons was one of the two who did not go to Edinburgh."

"She was ill, Mr. Pons."

"I fancy her home will be the most likely place for our next visit. Will you be so good as to telephone her and ask her to receive us immediately? Please also ask your other fellow-bibliophiles to see us briefly in the course of the evening."

"Certainly, Mr. Pons. Permit me to put a car at your disposal."

"Thank you. It will facilitate our movements. Perhaps with good fortune I shall be able to recover your miniature."

So saying, Pons led the way from the house. We stood briefly on the kerb until the Baron's chauffeur brought his car around. Pons gave the address of Lady Monica Jevrons to the chauffeur and we drove away, Pons urging the driver to hasten.

"What manner of chase is this, Pons?" I asked dubiously.

"I have taken a shot in the dark, Parker," he replied. "But I daresay, unlike some of us who venture, I have come close to the mark."

It was midnight when we returned to 7B, Praed Street.

"A most entertaining evening," said Pons jubilantly. "A delightful character, this fellow who is able to transform himself in the space of a single day from Mr. Wootyn of Sotheby's to Colonel Wade's cousin from Bristol, from Sir Austin Mannell's solicitor to Kester Roxbrugh's business manager. I am impatient to meet him. He has made no less than four separate attempts to reach Lady Jevrons's collection, and six to get at Alan Thomason's. Apparently he disdains simple breaking and entering. But I am confident that he will not despair; he will continue to try. Let us have a look at our catch."

He had removed his Inverness and deerstalker cap. Now he placed on the table the tiny books, so beautifully made, which, with the permission of their owners, he had taken from the "spiders" of Lady Jevrons and Alan Thomason. I confess that, being tired and irritable after our wild chase over London, I eyed them with profound disfavour.

"I cannot pretend to understand collectors," I remarked. "They pay fabulous sums for comparative trifles."

"There is much in what you say," replied Pons, shrugging into his dressing-gown. "Yet you have a kinship with them, Parker -- you are no less assiduous in assembling notes for these trifling adventures of mine."

He drew forward his magnifying glass and bent to the first of the books.

I stood behind him, looking down. The tiny books, which were approximately an inch by three fourths of an inch, were singularly beautiful in craftsmanship. They appeared to have been written in a script with the aspect of print, and the pages were decorated with hieroglyphics which had an indisputable look of authenticity. They were bound in limp leather, with decorative end-sheets, intricately scrolled. To Pons's face now had come that intentness of expression so characteristic of him; he was plainly "on the scent" -- the keenness of his eyes, the pursed lips, the angular line of his jaw, all gave evidence that the miniature books challenged his imagination.

In a few moments he was lost in contemplation; he might have been unaware of my existence; so I left him shortly after and retired.

How long he sat up studying the tiny books I had no way of knowing in the morning, for when I came to breakfast, he sat at the table, obviously waiting for me. His eyes had a glint of satisfaction in them, and the moment I appeared he proffered one of the miniatures.

"Take a look at the endpapers, Parker. What do you make of them?"

I took the book, waiting upon Mrs. Johnson to bring breakfast, and scrutinized the endpaper decoration with care. The elaborate design which Yeovil had worked into the pages was planned for a single page, and repeated thus four times on the two endpapers.

"The motif looks Egyptian," I said at last.

"It is meant to," replied Pons.

"There appears to be a numeral worked into the design," I ventured.

"Capital, Parker! What is it?"

"6." I hesitated. "But, of course, there are six books. This is manifestly the sixth of the group."

"Then there would be a numeral, too, in this one, would there not? What do you see?"

He gave me the second of the miniatures. Look as I might, I could not discover any numeral on the endpapers of the second miniature. But that there was something to be seen I could not doubt; Pons had discovered something, and he meant that I, too, should do so. I studied the design with the greatest attention and ultimately found what appeared to be the letter "B." I said as much.

"Excellent, my good Parker! So, indeed it is."

"But what significance does it have?" I asked.

"I have worked upon the problem half the night. If you will study the text, you will observe that the book with the letter in it would seem to be the concluding volume of the set of miniatures. An examination of the text in the volume featured by the numeral suggests that it is the second of the series. We have thus to suppose that the numeral or numerals in addition to the letter or letters compose a message of some kind. I submit that not very much of a message could be contained in six letters or numerals. But they could very readily convey such a message as an address. Proceeding,

therefore, on that deduction, we begin with this arrangement —
Here he thrust before me a piece of paper upon which he had written:

" 6 — — — B "

"Now, either the message to be conveyed is an address or it is not. If it is not, then we are left with the suggestion of a code which must be extremely limited, and must therefore also be known to very few persons. Yeovil has been in Dartmoor for so long a time that the possibility of anyone's reading such a code with ease is appreciably diminished. That it is an address is much the more likely probability. Accepting that assumption, we do not find any very great difficulty confronting us. It is not likely that more than the first three spaces are occupied by numerals, and the probability is that the '6' is the last numeral of two, the first is then, necessarily one of but nine numerals. It is manifest, furthermore, that there is no designation for street, road, lane, square, court, or place of any kind; I submit that this very absence suggests an address which ought to be relatively easy to discover. 'B' is then the last letter of an abbreviation; presumably, it is either the third or fourth letter of the abbreviation. I began with the assumption that it is the fourth, and proceeded to consider the streets and byways of London, with particular attention to the vicinity of Yeovil's sphere of greatest activity, which was not far away. I began with Barbers Hall in Monkwell Street, and went steadily down the list of all the streets which might satisfy the requirements. There is scarcely any need to burden you with all the details of my search, but I concluded finally with Holborn. I had then the following—"

He handed me yet another slip of paper upon which he had written: " — 6 H O L B . "

"However, when I had applied each digit from one to nine in turn to this address, none seemed to me likely as the repository for the kind of — shall we say 'treasure'? — I expected to find. Yet I was loath to discard Holborn. It was squarely in the centre of Yeovil's sphere; it was certainly the likeliest from any points of view, yet the numerals did not satisfy. It occurred to me finally that by only a slight alteration, to High Holburn, I arrived at this —"

A third slip of paper was forthcoming: " — 6 H H L B . "

"And at once it was evident that the address must be 16, High Holborn. That is the address of the Soames Museum, an institution

supported by funds out of a private trust, and open to donations of pieces fitting the various exhibits. What could be more ideal as a repository than a semi-private museum? If your practise permits, we shall just take a run over there this morning."

"And where does Yeovil, the forger, fit into all this?"

"I talked to the Deputy-Governor of Princetown this morning. Poor Yeovil, alas! is not long for this world. He was stricken with a fatal malady in August, and his death is but a matter of a fortnight away. I submit that the long arm of coincidence dangles too insistently upon the scene. Surely it is too much to consider it only coincidence that the onset of Yeovil's malady in August should be followed within a month by the appearance of the Boar's Head hoax and the purloining of four of the miniature book forgeries created by Yeovil before his capture? No, Parker, the matter strikes me as essentially simple—Yeovil had kept his secret against the hope of escape. He revealed it only when he realized that the secret would no longer serve him. How he did it, I do not yet know. The experts at the Yard are not amateurs, and Yeovil was certainly aware that his effects were sorely wanted. I have reason to hope that we have anticipated Yeovil's wishes in the course he desired his correspondent to follow."

"But what 'treasure' could Yeovil have hidden?"

Pons shrugged. "We shall discover that, I hope, in good time. We shall also find out to whom Yeovil revealed his secret. I asked the prison authorities for the names of those people with whom Yeovil corresponded, and I have their promise to send along the names and addresses just as soon as they can be ascertained. I fancy that a lifelong prisoner in Dartmoor is not likely to have many friends who correspond with him with any regularity after so long a time in prison."

At this moment Mrs. Johnson entered with our breakfast, her plain, honest features beaming with pleasure at the contemplation of our enjoyment of the food she prepared with such maternal concern for our welfare.

Immediately after our meal, we made our way to the Soames Museum, in advance of opening hours, for Pons had made arrangements with the curator for our admission. The building housed the one-time collection of the late Sir Rowley Soames, and such pieces as had been added by various donors since his time. It was open to the public five afternoons each week. It was not a large

museum, but three attendants and the curator and his staff were regularly employed there, though at this hour of the morning only the attendants and the curator were present.

The curator was a corpulent man of middle age, with thinning hair and a pinkness of complexion common to people who are seldom in the sun. He wore pince-nez, which lent him dignity, but failed to conceal the anxiety with which he greeted us.

"I know you by reputation, of course, Mr. Pons," he said. "I do hope that your visit here will not result in the appearance of any unfavourable publicity."

"I am confident that we can keep the matter from the papers, Mr. Fredenthal. It is highly confidential, and this visit, if I am correct in my assumption, may actually forestall precisely the kind of public notice you seem to fear."

"What can I do for you, Mr. Pons?" asked the curator apprehensively.

"I should like to know what pieces were added to the museum in the years 1911 and perhaps 1910, either by a gentleman named Yeovil or anonymously. There is a more remote possibility that the pieces I am seeking were sent to the museum under some other name, but the probability is that they were sent anonymously."

"Stolen?" asked Fredenthal immediately.

Pons smiled. "Dear me, how we do fear the worst! I think not."

"Well, that should be easy, Mr. Pons," replied the curator then, and bustled about to take from his desk a volume labeled *Acquisitions*. "That was before my coming to Soames, but the record should be here." He was turning the pages as he spoke. "Now, let us see—1911 was the year, I think you said. We don't ordinarily receive many accessions, as perhaps you know. Ah, here is 1910. Six acquisitions in that year—only one anonymous, however, which is dated December, a set of four books bound in vellum, purporting to be thirteenth-century volumes, illuminated."

"You say 'purported'?" asked Pons.

"There is some question about their authenticity, Mr. Pons." He turned another page. "Here we are in 1911, and again we have but one anonymous donation, early in the year—a Norse seaman's chest."

"I would like to examine both books and chest, Mr. Fredenthal," said Pons without hesitation. "I fancy they are the items in which we are interested."

"I will have them here in no time at all, sir."

The curator was as good as his word. In but a few minutes the set of books, bound in hand-tooled white vellum, and the chest, a small, squat object, painted a dull green with a flower decoration, and secured by bands of wrought iron, were put down before Pons.

"These are Yeovil's," said Pons without a moment's hesitation. "Here is the same precision of craftsmanship." He took up one of the books, put it down, and picked up another. In this fashion, he handled all four of the volumes. He opened each one in turn. "These are surely uncommonly heavy," he reflected. "Yet none has many pages, though the parchment appears to be genuine. But it was always so with Yeovil's work." He gave his attention to the binding of the book. The front and back covers were unusually thick; each cover represented a thickness of almost an inch and, while the outside appeared to be soft and padded, the inside cover was firm, with a sheet of parchment pasted over an endpaper. "A pity that so good an artist should have turned to crime," murmured Pons.

He turned to the sea-chest. It was not locked. He opened it and looked inside. It was quite empty.

"I observe this chest has a great deal of weight, also," said Pons. "I know comparatively little of Norse customs. Are such chests commonly weighted?"

The curator nodded. "They are usually taken on sea voyages, and they are made weighted, usually with a thick, heavy bottom. This chest is no exception, you see, Mr. Pons. We have considered it authentic."

"I fear I shall be obliged to commit an act of vandalism, Mr. Fredenthal. I believe the bottom of this chest is not solid."

"But certainly it isn't hollow, Mr. Pons."

"No, sir, it is not. But I submit that it is not entirely wood. The chest has too much weight to be accounted for in the heavy bottom or the iron bands. The books, too, have more weight than they should have. I regret this necessity, but the only alternative would result in a distressing kind of attendant publicity."

The curator acquiesced, and Pons set to work.

In a short time he had taken the chest apart, and there lay revealed a heavy block of wood which had served as its bottom. But it was evident now that it was not a solid block, for it was made up of two layers, the bottom layer very thick, the top thin and mortised

in. Pons lost no time in removing the top layer and exposing the bottom and its contents, a set of tools and dies, laid into the solid block.

"Great heavens, Mr. Pons!" exclaimed the curator. "What are those objects?"

"They represent something sought by Scotland Yard for twenty years, Mr. Fredenthal—the tools and dies used by the forger, Yeovil, to perfect the almost undetectable forgeries of sovereigns and guineas which made their appearance in 1909 and are still turning up here and there today. We will find the rest of the paraphernalia in the covers of these books. I shall take these things along with me, Mr. Fredenthal, and dispatch them with my compliments to Chief Inspector Titus at Scotland Yard; he was the sergeant in charge at the time of Yeovil's arrest. I fancy it will not take too much trouble to repair these spurious antiques. I should add that they deserve some sort of niche of their own; I doubt that all England is likely to produce a craftsman of Yeovil's ability more than once in a century."

Back at number 7B, we found a message from the Governor of Princetown. Mrs. Johnson had scrupulously copied it in her laborious script.

Pons took it up and read it aloud. "'Yeovil has had only two regular correspondents since the death of his brother in 1927. They are a sister, Mrs. Clement Jones, 13A Lord Street, Bristol, and a nephew, Alastair White, 33 Gerrard Street, London.' I daresay it is White we want; the impersonations would have been beyond Yeovil's sister, surely. We should manage to reach his place during the lunch-hour. His quarters are not far from the theatrical district, and it is entirely likely that he is an actor. If we take the Underground at Baker Street we can go up to Leicester Square from Piccadilly."

I protested. "But to what end, Pons? We have the dies."

"And I will send them off to Titus within the hour by messenger at the same time that I return the miniatures to Lady Jevrons and Alan Thomason," answered Pons. "Some kind of report ought to be made to our client, as well. But I submit that the primary problem is not the recovery of the dies and tools, nor yet the solution to the intriguing mystery of the Boar's Head catalogue hoax and the six silver spiders, but the ultimate future of a young man who has already shown a brilliant if erratic talent. Stay at home if you like Parker, but I want a look at Alastair White."

It was clearly Pons's plan to gain access to Alastair White's rooms before that young man himself returned. In this he had no difficult task; he represented himself as a friend of White's, and, with knowledge of the easy familiarity that obtained among members of the theatrical profession, White's landlady readily admitted us to his rooms, a second-floor suite, furnished in excellent taste.

Once inside, however, Pons's casual air dropped from him. He stood in the middle of the sitting-room looking all about him, his keen eyes missing nothing.

"A man of method and determination," he murmured. "He would seem to be scrupulously neat, for everything is in its place, including —" he moved swiftly forward as he spoke "his letters." He lifted them from the rack on the desk as he spoke, and carried them with him to a chair near the window, from which he could watch the street below.

"What now?" I asked, though it seemed evident what he meant to do.

"I am going to read his mail," said Pons without compunction.

"Like any common policeman," I said.

"You impugn our police, Parker. Say rather, 'like any common detective.' But add in what cause."

He was already scanning the letters. For some moments he read silently, rapidly finishing one letter and turning to the next. "Ah, these are subtle," he said at last. "Yeovil has been doing his best to persuade his nephew that security on the stage is difficult to achieve, that it is difficult in all walks of life save crime."

"Surely he does not say so!"

"Not in so many words. But the effect is manifest, particularly when these letters are read cumulatively. They are insidious — they appeal to vanity, attack integrity, undermine courage. Ah, Yeovil is clever, far too clever! And how many letters there were before this group, which dates from May of this year, it is impossible to say. But here we are in August." He read for a moment. "Yeovil has had his attack of illness; he suspects it to be mortal. Yes, yes — he writes 'They have not given me any reason to hope here in the prison hospital that I will leave here alive. In the last few days I have been thinking more and more often of the life I have led, and I could wish I could resume it where I left off — not the criminal life, my boy, but the creative life. Or that someone else could pick it up where I ceased to live. But the race, I say again, as I have said before, is to the ingenious, not to the brute. It is as true in one walk

of life as in the other, in art as in crime, and indeed, perfect crimes are always works of art. The challenge is before you, as it is before all of us at a given but seldom foreknown time in life. When I consider the beautiful things I have made in imitation, it is true but in some cases the imitations were even better than the originals. I believe that the treasure I would like to see most of all is my little set of six silver spiders and their miniature books. If ever you get the chance, by all means look them over. You will understand what your old uncle meant when I write that I regret having relinquished that work.' He could hardly have been any plainer, and yet he makes no gift of his treasure to his nephew; he must exercise his utmost ingenuity to achieve it," finished Pons.

He restored the letters to their previous position, and then began a systematic search of Alastair White's quarters. He opened drawers, looked through the cupboard, examined all the books on the shelves, and finally returned to look at the little group of books set up between bookends on our quarry's desk. He took them up, one after another, reading their titles, until at last he gave a little crow of triumph, and turned with an ancient-looking little volume in his hands.

"This one seems out of place, eh, Parker?"

I read its title: *Sermons du Père Bretonneau de la Compagnie de Jésus.*

Then, with an easy gesture, Pons opened it past its seventieth page and disclosed a box; the book was a cleverly made dummy, and the box thus revealed contained four more of the tiny miniature books which had been taken from Yeovil's six silver spiders. Pons took them carefully from their repository and put them into his pocket.

In half an hour, the owner of the rooms came. Pons saw him from the window, and was on his feet in the middle of the floor to greet him when he entered.

He was a man approaching thirty, not ill-favoured in looks, with singular presence, and a personality which was at once apparent. His brief uncertainty at sight of us was controlled and dissipated in a moment. His dark eyes took in first one, then the other of us, measuring us as he put his walking-stick away.

"Mr. Alastair White, I believe," said Pons. "We are recent admirers of your work, particularly your splendid impersonation of Mr. Anthony Wootyn of Sotheby's."

The smile of pleasure which had begun to grow on his face was arrested; it faded. He looked at Pons in sharp alarm.

"Permit me," said Pons, bowing. "Solar Pons, at your service. Allow me to present Dr. Lyndon Parker."

"Ah, the detective," said White with an almost dramatic air. "Mr. Pons, I have committed no crime."

"Surely not yet if we discount the abstraction of the four miniature books from your uncle's silver scarabs and the impertinent hoax perpetrated upon six of the city's most illustrious bibliophiles. It would seem to be a pity, however, that so imaginative a gentleman, so accomplished an impersonator, should consider even for a moment yielding to the subtle blandishments of his dying uncle, no matter how much he may have admired him in his childhood and youth. Tell me, Mr. White, were you aware of the nature of the 'treasure' you were seeking?"

White looked warily from Pons to me and back again, saying nothing.

"Pray do not be suspicious. I am not here to place you under arrest. Not yet. That alternative lies with you. I have recovered the miniatures and will return them to their owners. I have read your uncle's letters, and I should like to ask you again whether you know what 'treasure' he had hidden for you to find?"

"No, Mr. Pons, I did not. I thought perhaps it was money."

"I have recovered the 'treasure' but two hours ago; it is now at Scotland Yard. Mr. White, it consisted of the tools and dies your uncle used to make those excellent counterfeit sovereigns and guineas for which he is justly famed in the annals of crime. He has led you to the brink of a career of crime. The tools and dies are now out of your reach but you might well have been faced with the decision of whether to use them or not. The high place is still before you, however. I suggest that your uncle's insidious letters do not tell all the story or even offer you the alternatives. I should consider that the mind which conceived and executed the Boar's Head catalogue hoax would be lost on crime even as your uncle's was. May I extend my invitation to join us at dinner and let me present the alternatives to your uncle's suggestion?"

"Mr. Pons, whatever I say can be turned against me."

Pons chuckled. "Mr. White, pray excuse me. I will wait on the pavement below for five minutes. If you should elect to accept my invitation, I hope to see you soon. If not, you may be sure that we

will ultimately meet again, in less pleasant circumstances. Good-day, sir."

Three minutes after we reached Gerrard Street, Alastair White came from the house. He came striding up to Pons with outstretched hand and a pleasant, sunny smile on his handsome face.

"Mr. Solar Pons," he said. "I believe we have an engagement for dinner."

The Adventure of the Stone of Scone

THAT MEMORABLE Christmas morning, my friend Solar Pons woke me with a firm hand on my shoulder well before dawn. Our quarters were still dark, save for the glow of a light Pons had lit in the sitting-room. Bending above me, he waited until he was sure I was awake before he spoke.

"A Merry Christmas to you, Parker," he said in an infectiously gay voice. "We are about to have the best Christmas gift of all—a client is on his way here."

"At this hour!" I cried. "It can't be more than four o'clock."

"A quarter to the hour. Ah, but it is even more extraordinary than you think. It is my brother Bancroft who is coming. You may judge for yourself the gravity of a situation which dislodges that lover of his comfort from his bed at this incredible hour."

I got out of bed with alacrity.

"You may as well dress, Parker, if you mean to accompany me. My brother needs no assistance at armchair theorizing; so I fancy we shall be required to do some field work, at which Bancroft does not shine."

I had hardly joined Pons in the sitting-room, when I caught the sound of a car drawing up to the kerb outside, and, glancing at Pons, I saw by the anticipatory gleam in his eyes that he had no doubt his brother was below. Nor was he mistaken, for within a few moments Bancroft Pons had made his usually silent ascent to our quarters and stood on the threshold. I marveled anew at the ease with which so massive a man moved so soundlessly. As usual, he stood for a moment surveying us, taking in our dress, at which he nodded his impressive, almost leonine head, in approval. His customarily sleepy eyes were alight, his proud, sensuous mouth was almost a-tremble, and as he came into the room I observed that he was agitated.

"I need hardly say I know you have come on a matter of the utmost gravity," said Pons. "One not connected with the Foreign Office—at this hour. Extraordinary! You have been somewhere on your hands and knees. In dust, too. One of the government buildings?"

"Spare me these exercises," said Bancroft testily. "It is an extraordinary matter indeed!"

"I meant," interposed my companion gently, "it was extraordinary to discover you had been on your hands and knees."

Bancroft Pons made an impatient gesture and grimaced. "Let us have done with this *Kinderspiel* and come to the matter in hand. It is this the Stone of Scone has been stolen from Westminster Abbey."

"This bids fair to be the merriest of Christmases!" cried Pons, smiling his delight.

"If chasing about the countryside is accounted a pleasure, it may well be," agreed Bancroft in distaste. "The theft was discovered over an hour ago. The night-watchman making his round at eleven found all in order. There was a change of watchmen at that hour and the next man passed through Edward the Confessor's Chapel shortly after two o'clock. He saw marks on the carpet that suggested a heavy object had been dragged down the altar steps. At the altar, he discovered that the Stone had been pried loose from under the Coronation Chair.

"The trail led away through the transept, past the Dryden memorial and the graves of Browning and Tennyson, and out of the building at a side door near Poets' Corner. Presumably a car waited near there. You may well imagine into what consternation this singular event has thrown the government, since it is known that there are certain strong anti monarchists who might wish to embarrass His Majesty and strike a blow for republicanism."

"I can, indeed," murmured Pons. "The government have always been more fearful of losing face than an Oriental. I daresay the Prime Minister's assassination could not have disturbed them more."

"Any matter which has brought me to my hands and knees is not a subject for drollery," said Bancroft. "The matter has thrown the Metropolitan Police and Scotland Yard into the most unimaginable uproar. The roads and ports are being watched and all cars traveling to Scotland, Wales, and Ireland are being stopped and searched. The police are preparing to drag the Thames and various lakes and reservoirs. But I need not set forth for you the various steps so inevitably taken by the gentlemen of the Yard."

"No one witnessed the theft of a stone weighing almost five hundred pounds?" asked Pons.

"No one," said Bancroft. "Pray refresh your memory. Last night was Christmas Eve, one of revelry. One might expect that the wits of the constabulary would be less sharp and they themselves less suspicious than usual."

"The Stone's value?"

"Only symbolic. Hardly four shillings. An idiotic crime!"

Pons smiled. "How like the government to concern itself far more over a symbol than something of true value!"

Bancroft refused to rise to Pons's pin-pricks. "My car is waiting," he said. "Everything has been left undisturbed at the Abbey, though photographers are there and it is abominably cluttered by the police and government officials."

Pons had already donned his Inverness and deerstalker.

In the car, Pons turned to his brother. "That was surely sandstone on your trousers, Bancroft. The Stone was damaged?"

"It would appear to have been," replied Bancroft cautiously. "Not at the Throne, where it was pried loose, but just a bit from it, before it was taken through the transept. You may not have known, Solar, but there has been a fissure in the Stone; the treatment accorded it tonight may well have widened and broken it."

Pons said no more for the remainder of the journey.

Curious celebrants of the Christmas Eve had gathered outside Westminster Abbey, and stood in wondering groups staring at the official cars before the building. Inside, there seemed at first to be even more people, but most of them were being kept in the vicinity of the hut-like tomb of St. Edward, which rose in a railed enclosure before the Coronation Chair.

The scene of the desecration now lay before us. The Stone of Scone had been enclosed beneath the Coronation Chair. It had been held in place by a small bar of wood, not of itself a part of the Chair. This had been splintered and broken, so that the Stone could be pried from beneath the Chair and slid out. The marks of the heavy Stone, which weighed four hundredweight, were plainly to be seen; it had been dragged down and off toward the transept to the right. Not far from the Chair lay a marked deposit of sandstone dust and particles where the damage Pons had deduced had taken place.

The photographers had finished their work, and our old friend Jamison of Scotland Yard, who appeared to be in charge, beckoned us forward and greeted us with manifest pleasure.

"I'm afraid they'll be wasting your time, Pons," he said. "I told them these fellows have left a trail wide enough for an amateur to follow."

"In that case," observed Bancroft Pons dryly, "I should have thought you would be following it. Admittedly, anyone can follow it out of the Abbey; beyond that, the problem is a little more complicated."

Pons had not troubled to do more than smile at Jamison. Already he was on his hands and knees before the Coronation Chair, beckoning for the clearer light of one of the electric torches carried by the police. Two or three torches were immediately directed at the Chair; one of them Pons appropriated when he finished there. With it, he began to follow the trail of the Stone through the transept toward the Poets' Corner door out of which the Stone had gone from the Abbey.

Just beyond the Poets' Corner door in a direct line with it was a wrought-iron gate. Pons went straight to it.

"No, no Pons, the Stone went around here and to a gate in the fence off to the left, at the Masons' Yard," protested Jamison.

"All in good time, Jamison," answered Pons, who now busied himself with a close scrutiny of the gate. "You've observed these marks and scratches, I take it?"

"The gate around the corner has been jemmied open," said Jamison flatly.

"Just so," said Pons. "Let us have a look at it."

So saying, he again took up the trail of the Stone, following it to the left of the Poets' Corner door, and down along a solid wooden fence separating the lane outside from the Masons' Yard between fence and Abbey. He turned the light of his torch on this door, which stood slightly ajar, and then, finished with his examination of it, he opened it and stepped into the lane outside. We were now not many yards from the gate before the Poets' Corner door, which rose up spectrally on the right.

Without turning, Pons said, "You will have observed that this lock was opened from inside, while the Poets' Corner door was forced from outside. This was then only a place of exit, the Poets' Corner was used for both entrance and exit."

"We noticed that," said Jamison curtly.

"Was there a policeman on duty in the vicinity?" asked Pons then.

"Yes, we have him inside," answered Jamison. "We've thought of all that, Pons. He saw a car here."

"At this gate?"

"No, nearer that iron gate up there."

"Let us just speak to him again."

Jamison led the way back into Westminster Abbey.

Police Sergeant Trowbridge was a pale-faced young man, now plainly nervous in the presence of so many of his superiors. He listened quietly to Jamison's instructions to answer Pons's questions.

"What kind of car did you see outside the Abbey?" asked Pons.

"A Ford, Mr. Pons."

"At what time?"

"It was near to three o'clock. There was a young couple in it, sir. Kissing and such-like. Nothing unusual, especially for Christmas morning. There were a lot of people moving about; there always are Christmas morning. Almost like the New Year's, Mr. Pons. Some of them a little the worse for drink."

"That was the only car?"

"No, sir. The only car at that hour. There was another about four, and there was one earlier. But in the same time, there were people moving up the lane. Four men who had been drinking at about a quarter to three. Two couples at ten minutes past. And so on. In all, I should think there were perhaps fifty people seen between midnight and four o'clock, and seven cars. But the one at Poets' Corner gate was there at the right time."

"You spoke to the occupants?"

"Yes, Mr. Pons. I went up and flashed my torch at them. I said, 'Here, here, what a ruddy time and place for the likes of this!' And the young fellow turned to me with the marks of her all over his face, and said, 'It's Christmas Eve, officer.' And I said, 'Christmas Eve, is it! It's three o'clock Christmas morning!' And he said, 'Ochone! Ochone! Is it that late it is already?' 'Crown property you're on,' I said to him. And he said, 'I know we shouldn't be here.' And then she opened up, a pretty, dark-haired girl right enough, and said to me, 'But where can we go? The other streets are so crowded.' And so they were, and she gave me such a look, I felt sorry for them, and I said, 'There's a dark car park not far along.' And she said they were just in from the country, too late for rooms, and with the look of being too much in love—holding hands all the time they talked to me—and all, and maybe I could run them in and give

them a bed in the cells. So I said, 'There's not a policeman in London apt to arrest you tonight,' which was the fact, since none would take kindly to having to appear against anyone in court on Boxing Day. I walked off then and left them there, and when I came back a quarter of an hour later, they were gone."

"They were young people?"

"Perhaps twenty-four or -five, Mr. Pons."

"Thank you, Sergeant Trowbridge." Pons turned to Jamison. "Now, Jamison, what has been done apart from searching cars?"

"We are preparing to drag the Thames and the London reservoirs. We intend to question all known anti-monarchists and Scottish Covenanters."

"It can do no harm," said Pons with a quixotic smile. "Though I believe almost two million Scots signed the Covenant. I don't envy you your task."

"Pons, the Stone of Scone must be recovered as rapidly as possible. H.M. Government must not be embarrassed by such republican acts," said Jamison.

"If the government is so easily embarrassed, then it has already been embarrassed," answered Pons. "However, I doubt very much that there will be any immediate further developments. I am confident the investigation is in capable hands, Jamison." He turned to me. "Come, Parker, I fancy we have finished here."

In the car once more, Bancroft Pons observed caustically, "I have seldom known you to be more ambiguous, Solar."

"Ambiguity has its uses, my dear Bancroft. Consider, for instance, how much more felicitous it will be to have that good bumbler, Jamison, off on a hue and cry dragging the waters of London for an object which is most certainly not in that quarter. The police sometimes have a bedeviling habit of getting in the way."

"Ah, you are prepared to lay hands on the Stone?"

"Nothing of the sort. I haven't the slightest idea where it is at the moment, save in the hands of four young Scottish Nationalists, three men and a woman, somewhere in the vicinity of London, certainly not across any border. Its ultimate destination is undoubtedly Scotland. But it will not be transported until the hue and cry has died down. We shall just wait for the abductors of the Stone to show their hands. It seems to me the most sensible course. I submit that the whole plot has not long ago appeared in print."

"It has a familiar ring," conceded Bancroft Pons.

"I believe we share admiration for the many-faceted writings of Compton Mackenzie, particularly his brilliant comedies."

"Ah, *The North Wind of Love*."

"Precisely. In that novel the author describes a conspiracy to return the Stone of Scone to Scotland. It fails in his book. This time it appears to have succeeded, initially, at least. Perhaps that ardent Scottish Nationalist is unconsciously the author of this crime."

"Three men and a woman," mused Bancroft. "It would need not more than two men to drag the Stone. Why a third?"

"The marks on the Poets' Corner gate indicate that three men climbed over it. The door there was forced from the outside, but the gate in the wooden enclosure was pried open from within. At least two men went into the Abbey for the Stone, quite possibly all three went in. One returned in advance of the Stone. What more logical than to assume he came back to the car where the young lady waited, bearing the broken portion of the Stone, which, I should judge by the line of sandstone dust and particles marking the break, could hardly have been less than a quarter of the Stone, or a weight close to a hundred pounds? His arrival must have taken place fortuitously just prior to Sergeant Trowbridge's appearance, at which he and the young lady posed as lovers. The other two subsequently brought out the Stone and, once the Sergeant had gone on, loaded it at the opened gate, to which point the car was doubtless driven on their signal.

"The whole plot was evidently the result of long and careful planning. The habits of the night-watchmen of the Abbey were certainly known. The night selected for the deed was one on which pedestrians and cars which ordinarily would seem suspicious would pass almost unnoticed. The proximity to Boxing Day was surely also by design. The Stone of Scone has meaning for no one else but Scottish Nationalists. It has no monetary value. The abductors mean to return it to Scotland, where, they hold, it belongs. The Scots refer to it, by the way, as the *Lia Fail*—the Stone of Destiny, and some ascribe supernatural powers to it. Our Nationalists, however, are no supernaturalists, let it be known. I daresay they intend to make as much capital of this event as possible; we shall hear more of the Stone at their discretion."

"Scotland is an appreciable area to search," said Bancroft Pons dryly.

"For a man readily dismayed by even a tramp in the heather, I have no doubt," agreed Pons. "But I fancy all Scotland is not

necessarily subject to search. The Stone of Scone is associated with but a few places - the Abbey of Scone in Perthshire, where it was the base of the Coronation Chair of the Kings of Scotland; Dunstaffnage in Argyllshire, which was the headquarters of the Scots Chieftains before the line of succession was begun. I should hardly expect to find it very far from Glasgow."

"Why Glasgow?"

"Is that not the seat of the Scottish Covenant movement, from which stem all the Nationalists? I believe it is. I daresay a little journey to Glasgow is not ill-advised, and, if Parker is free to go, I think we will just run up there in a few days. There is no haste, as long as the search for the Stone is kept up; wherever the Stone now is, it is likely to remain for the time being."

Bancroft Pons bade us farewell at the kerb before 7B Praed Street. The grey day had now dawned, and neither of us was in the mood for more sleep. Pons was as keen as always when the game was afoot, eager to be up and about on the track of the desecrators of Westminster Abbey, but he was so obviously limited by the circumstances of the problem that he was forced to wait upon events.

Our entrance to our rooms coincided with Mrs. Johnson's arrival with breakfast and some little gifts to mark the holiday. We, too, had gifts for our patient landlady and took the opportunity to bestow them upon her, amid her protestations. This over, we settled to our breakfast, which, in keeping with the season of festivity, was a hearty one.

"You are not averse to a journey to Scotland, Parker?" Pons asked across the table.

"Not at all. Though how you hope to catch the vandals is beyond me."

"All in good time. 'Vandals,' however, is a hard word. I fancy they look upon themselves as patriots."

"Yes," I retorted, "as Robin Hood looked on himself as a patron of the poor rather than as a robber."

Pons chuckled. "Dear me, I fear you grow more conservative every year. I noticed in my examination of the Coronation Chair that singular care had been taken to do it no damage. In one place, true, three letters had been crudely drawn 'J F S' - surely 'Justice for Scotland' - but the Chair, which might easily have been badly broken in the haste that was necessary, was otherwise untouched. And the Stone itself was at least partially wrapped, as the trail with

sandstone particles along two sides and not in the middle clearly suggests. No, I venture to say that the perpetrators of what tomorrow's wireless and newspapers will call 'this desecrating outrage' are young people of remarkable fire and imagination, and with a certain respect for such relics, determined to strike a blow for Scottish Nationalism in a fashion dramatic enough to stir a similar fire in the imagination of all England. The *Lia Fail* is the symbol of Scottish independence and surely the logical object of the Covenanters' attention."

"It will certainly arouse England," I agreed.

"And the Scottish Nationalists," said Pons. "Tomorrow's papers will carry apt quotations from the leaders of the movement. The Duke of Montrose will 'not regret the fact that the Stone is on its way back to Scotland'; the Scottish Patriots' Association will say the Stone has been 'retrieved, not stolen'; Mr. Compton Mackenzie will issue a round of hearty applause, and, as a patriotic Scot, will express his 'elation'; and *The Times* will most certainly stigmatize the act as 'a coarse and vulgar crime.' "

"I must confess," I admitted guardedly, "I'm not sure just what the Stone of Scone is, except that it is the ancient Coronation Stone of the Scots."

"Actually, it is probably a piece of the red sandstone to be found near Dunstaffnage Castle, though some believers hold that it is the very stone on which Jacob rested his head in Biblical times. It is about twenty-six inches long, and sixteen wide, and weighs considerably over four hundred pounds, almost five. Some centuries ago, two iron rings were attached to it to aid in its transportation. It first came into Scottish history when King Kenneth II of Scotland set it up to mark his conquest of the country in 840 A.D. Thereafter, the Scottish kings were crowned on a throne which rose above the Stone. When Edward I of England turned from ravaging Wales to subdue Scotland in 1296, he seized the Stone and brought it to England. During the years that followed, Edward II, in the Treaty of Northampton, promised to return the Stone to Scotland; but that article of the treaty was never honoured, and the Stone remained in Westminster Abbey until its disappearance this morning."

"Then the Scots have a right to it!" I cried.

"I have no doubt of it."

For the remainder of that day, Pons busied himself with his scrapbooks. He apparently gave no further thought to the problem

in hand, and I forebore to question him about it, though more than once the impulse was strong to do so, for it was not his custom to sit idly by and wait upon events. The next morning, when I came into our sitting-room, I found him at the wireless, chuckling, as he listened to the venerable Dean of Westminster making an impassioned appeal for the return of the Stone of Scone.

"He will 'go to the ends of the earth' to recover it," said Pons dryly. "Can he have imagined that some supernatural agency has transported it here?" He turned on me, shutting off the wireless. "The BBC has just announced that no less than eight thousand policemen are searching for the Stone, a venture that will cost His Majesty's subjects a tidy sum every hour."

"At least you're not one of them," I said, not without irony.

"Happily no," Pons agreed. "I submit that the Stone is very probably hidden in the environs of London. I venture to say that not a tenth of the searching policemen would recognize it if they saw the Stone. Despite its size, it ought to lend itself easily to concealment. Quite openly among other stones, for instance. Pushed under a ledge of rock. Buried. In any case, the next move is up to the Stone's abductors. If no word has been received from them in ten days, I shall call in the Praed Street Irregulars and see what we can do. But I fancy we shall have word of them in good time."

As usual, Pons was correct in his surmise. Within the week, the *Glasgow Daily Record* significantly published a petition, addressed to His Majesty, which the newspaper had received by post. It was unsigned, but its terms left no doubt that the Stone of Scone had indeed been taken by ardent Scottish Nationalists, for it begged His Majesty to accept the return of the Stone on condition that it would remain in Scotland "in such of His Majesty's properties or otherwise as shall be deemed fitting by him." The same issue of the *Record* announced the rumour that the Stone of Destiny was in Scotland at last.

Pons read both the petition and the article with dancing eyes. "Now they are preparing to move the Stone into Scotland," he said.

"The paper clearly indicates it is already there," I pointed out.

"A ruse to draw off the police. No, the Stone is still in England, to be moved across, once the search is relaxed. Let us lose no time getting up to Glasgow."

Accordingly, we took a train at Euston next morning, and

arrived in Glasgow early that evening. Pons had wired ahead for accommodations at the Beresford on Sauchiehall Street. Despite the tiring, daylong journey, Pons showed no inclination to resume his leisurely habits of the past week. Here he was all bustle. He hardly stopped for supper before he took himself off.

I did not see Pons again for twenty-four hours, for I was asleep when he returned that night, and he was gone next morning before I woke. But at the supper hour of the following day, he walked into the dining-room of the Beresford. I saw by the look of satisfaction on his lean, hawk-like face, that he had made some discoveries.

"I hope you haven't noticed my absence over-much, Parker," he said, sitting down at the table. "I have spent much of the last evening and today at the Mitchell Library looking into the literature of the Stone."

"I thought you remarkably well informed about it," I said.

"Ah, my interest was not in reading about the Stone, but in discovering who might have been reading about it within the past months. Would you not say it was more than a coincidence that every scrap of information about the Stone of Scone lodged in the Mitchell Library has been scrutinized within the six weeks prior to the theft of the relic by a young student known for his Scottish Nationalist sympathies?"

"Indeed I would. Who is he?"

"His name is Ian MacCormick. He is twenty-five and a student in law. He has today set out with two companions in a Ford car on what appears to be a journey of some distance. I submit he is on his way to England for the Stone."

"Have you arranged to have him followed?"

"I fancy there is no need. If he is not caught on the way, he will return here with the Stone, prepared to take it to its ultimate destination."

"And that?"

"He is an impulsive, imaginative young man. In one of the books dealing with the subject, there were certain notes I took to be in his hand. He had set down three names. They were the Abbey of Scone, Dunstaffnage Castle, and Arbroath Abbey. Of these, he had crossed out the first two, manifestly because they were too obvious in their historical connection to the Stone."

"I don't recall your mention of Arbroath Abbey before. Where is it?"

"Some eighty miles to the north, above Dundee, on the east

coast. It has a notable association with the Scottish Nationalists, for it was at Arbroath Abbey that the Estates of Scotland met in 1320 to reaffirm their freedom. I rather think he and his companions mean the Stone to make its reappearance at one of these three places, since there is nothing to be gained for their cause, and indeed, all to be lost, by their retention of the Stone. It will do them no good laid away somewhere in a cellar. To properly dramatize their daring theft, the Stone must make as dramatic a reappearance as it did a disappearance. But the Abbey of Scone and Dunstaffnage Castle are too close in their association with the *Lia Fail* to venture there; Arbroath Abbey is not, and yet bears an equal significance to the cause of the Scottish Nationalists."

"And you propose to wait for MacCormick and the Stone here?"

"Not here, but at Arbroath. Pray do not stir yourself, Parker; there is no hurry. The young men left only today. The journey to London will take them many hours, since London is some four hundred miles from here. Then they must recover the Stone, conceal it in their car, and make their way back here—an overall journey of close to nine hundred miles, added to which is the distance to Arbroath Abbey in winter weather. We are in no haste for Arbroath."

The third day after found us at the ruins of Arbroath Abbey, to which we came by hired car, which the custodian of the Abbey concealed at our request. We spent all that day in vigil there, and waited well into the night.

No one came.

Next day we were back, and at midday Pons's patience was rewarded.

At that time a Ford car appeared on the road to the Abbey and came directly to the ruins. Three young men got out and, opening the back of the car, took from it a heavy object wrapped in the Scottish flag of St. Andrew. Among them, they carried the Stone into the ruins and directly to the high altar, behind which Pons and I stood with the custodian.

They deposited the Stone on the altar, and their leader, a handsome, fair-haired young man, spoke out in a ringing voice the words of the Estates of Scotland, words first affirmed in this place centuries before—"For so long as a hundred of us are left alive, we will yield in no least way to English domination. We fight not for glory nor for wealth nor for honour, but only and alone for freedom, which no good man surrenders but with his life."

At the conclusion of his speech, Pons stepped out from behind the high altar and advanced on the speaker. "Mr. Ian MacCormick, I believe Those are well-spoken words. My name is Solar Pons. We have an engagement for dinner."

"A 'tec, by St. Andrew!" cried one of MacCormick's companions in astonishment.

MacCormick only smiled.

There is little more to be told. At dinner young MacCormick and his fellow conspirators, together with the young woman who had aided them in London all likable young people told their story of the theft of the Stone of Scone. There was yet one more drama in which they hoped to take part their prosecution.

"Then we shall be able to tell the world," said MacCormick, his eyes shining. "The entire world will know of the Nationalist cause!"

Pons smiled and shook his head. "I'm afraid you will be disappointed," he said. "I fancy England will be satisfied with the return of the Stone and will refuse to make martyrs of you."

Nor was Pons in error. Scotland Yard duly announced the recovery of the Stone of Scone quite as if it had been an achievement of the police - and thereafter no one said one word of the identity of the abductors or of prosecution for the theft.

The Adventure of the Mazarine Blue

ON THAT TEMPESTUOUS spring night, my friend Solar Pons had just paused at the fireplace to knock out his pipe of shag, when from the street below, in a lull between the wind's gusts, came the sound of a motor. A gleam of anticipation came into Pons's eyes.

"Surely that is not a visitor at this hour!" I cried. "Why, it is eleven o'clock!"

"Not a visitor, I trust, but perhaps a client. A powerful car, Parker. And, short of sudden emergency in the city, come from some distance."

At this instant the outer door below opened and closed. There was not immediately any step on the stair.

"A stranger to these environs," said Pons dryly. "He is pausing to light his way and determine which floor it is he wants. Ah, he has seen your card, Parker; he is coming up."

In a moment the footsteps came to our ears.

"A man not yet in middle age, carrying a cane under his arm - listen to it occasionally strike the rail or draw along the wall. In some haste, too."

The knock that fell upon the door of 7B interrupted my companion's further deduction.

"Come in, come in," called Pons, all alert now, and still before the fireplace, his hands clasped behind him, his faded blue dressing-gown lax about his rangy figure.

In response to his call, the door was flung open, and a man of about thirty burst into the room. He was tall, thin, clad in what was once a military coat which reached to his knees, and did indeed carry a stick under one arm. He was hatless, but wore a monocle in his right eye. His face was pale, his eyes were somewhat feverish, and his dark moustache seemed almost black above his bloodless lips. His glance ignored me entirely and fixed at once on Pons.

"Mr. Solar Pons," he cried without preamble, "I am prepared to pay you any retainer you name if only you can solve the mystery of our ghastly discovery. We have not called the police since we discovered the body."

"Pray compose yourself, sir," said Pons. "You have obviously

come from some little distance and have allowed yourself to become overwrought. Just sit down—Dr. Parker will bring you a stimulant—and tell us your story from the beginning.”

“Mr. Pons, I beg you—there is no time to be lost. I have come all the way from Chetley Old Place near Stroud, Gloucestershire. I beg of you to come with me now, at once, and let me tell you my story on the way. My car is below.”

“Chetley Old Place,” mused Pons. “Then you are Sir Richard Chetley.”

“Yes, Mr. Pons. You were of service to my late father when I was in Australia over ten years ago.”

“A pause for a glass of whisky will not take much time,” said Pons then, as I came up with that stimulant for our client. “And you might just say in brief what it is that has upset you to the extent of your coming away without a hat in such inclement weather and driving over a hundred miles to our quarters.”

Sir Richard accepted the glass I proffered him, thanked me curtly, and turned once again to Pons. “Mr. Pons, late this afternoon we had occasion to open the family vault, our burial place for many decades. Twelve of us have been laid away in it—yet, today, there were thirteen coffins. And the thirteenth contained the decomposing remains of someone utterly unknown to me. Who he was, how he came there—we do not know. Will you come, Mr. Pons?”

There was no need for Pons to answer; he was already removing his dressing-gown, and I knew that to take issue with him would be folly.

As we drove through the night toward our destination, our client told his story without interruption. His aged aunt, the last remaining member of the preceding generation of his father's family, lay seriously ill at Chetley Old Place. Her life was despaired of, and, after dinner, our client had thought of making sure that all would be in readiness in the family burial vault, which he had not entered since the death of his father six years before. Old Sir Malcolm had been the twelfth member of the family to be laid in the vault. Sir Richard had taken with him one Jasper Nason, one of the two servants on the estate, the other being Mrs. Nason; indeed, it was Nason who drove the Rolls-Royce in which we rode.

“Our home, as you know, lies in the Cotswolds, and the vault is perhaps half a mile from the house, well away from the road, built into the side of a small knoll which is part of the estate,” explained

Sir Richard. "The lock on the vault door is a very old one, fashioned many years ago, and it yields only to an ancient hand-wrought key; indeed, the whole lock is handwrought. Nason carried the key, and it was he who opened the door while I held a lantern. The moment we stepped into the vault, we were aware of a very strong stench of decomposing flesh. This was astonishing, since to the best of my knowledge, no one had been in the vault during the six years following my father's death. But, in truth, we thought little of it, since the air flowing through the opened door soon seemed to dissipate it. I went directly to the place where we expected to lay Aunt Agatha, next to my father's coffin. Judge my amazement to find a coffin there, and with every sign of belonging there, save that it bore no nameplate, and was plainly a very inexpensive coffin. Nason was as astonished as I was.

"To add to our wonder, we discovered that the coffin was not sealed, but only nailed shut, and forthwith we pried it open. In it lay all that remained of a gentleman who could not have been dead very many months, killed by a savage blow on the head, for it was plain that his skull had been broken in from behind. He was unknown to me, and as unknown to Nason. I thought immediately of calling the police, but then I hesitated, I knew that once the local police had been called, there would be no keeping the mystery from the papers, and the discovery of an unidentified corpse in our family vault could hardly be kept from my aunt, and might prove to be a fatal shock to her. I thought of you at once, Mr. Pons. We closed the vault again, locked it, and set out immediately for London. That was three hours ago."

For a few moments Pons said nothing, and the only sound we heard was that of the motor as we drove westwards. Indeed, Pons seemed asleep, though I knew he was not, for I knew that attitude of intent listening only too well. Without opening his eyes, he spoke at last.

"The coffins in your vault, I take it, are placed in order and are reasonably uniform?" he asked.

"Yes, Mr. Pons. That was why I noticed at once that the thirteenth coffin was not one of ours. It could not have cost more than ten pounds."

"Yet it was placed similarly to the others—as if it belonged there?"

"It was."

"How many places are then left for the family, Sir Richard?"

"Well, sir, there are easily ten, I should say. There is a place for

my aunt, for one. There are places for myself and such family as I might have."

"You are not married, however," said Pons.

"No, sir. I am the last of the line."

"Is that not the direct line only? I seem to remember that your father had a brother, as well as two half-brothers, and a cousin, and that you, yourself, once had a cousin."

"So I did, Mr. Pons. That is a painful memory. You should recall it before me, since it was in the matter of my cousin Leonard that you were of service to my father; you sent him to Borstal with his bad companions, Hugo Mays and Alfred Tetlark, all of whom were engaged in a series of burglaries in this vicinity. The two younger fellows were given but four years of Borstal training; Alfred, who already had a record, went to prison for nine years. When Leonard was freed after four years, he and his father left England for Australia and were lost when their ship went down in a storm off the coast of New Zealand. Leonard's father was my father's half-brother, Henry. The other half-brother, Edward, also broke with my father over the prosecution of cousin Leonard, and we have lost sight of him - if, indeed, he is still alive. My father's only brother died before my father by a year, and is buried in our vault next to my mother's coffin, and thus but one coffin removed from my father's. My father's only cousin is dead, too, I believe; he died in America three years ago."

"There was no evidence that the lock had been tampered with?" asked Pons then.

"We did not stop to see, Mr. Pons. Certainly there was no obvious evidence, for we had to unlock the door to get it open, and the lock offered no more resistance than is customary. It is an old lock - by several generations - and it is a wonder that it still serves so well. But, then, the old things were more sturdily built."

"The vault itself is out of sight of the house?"

"Yes, Mr. Pons."

"And, doubtless, in an unfrequented place, so that anyone could obtain access to it without much fear of immediate discovery?"

"I suppose that is so, Mr. Pons."

"Very well. We shall see in good time. If you will forgive me, I will catch a few winks while we are en route to our destination. Pray let us go directly to the vault on our arrival. Wake me there."

So saying, he composed himself for sleep for the two hours of driving before us.

It was still dark as midnight when we reached the Chetlev vault.

Our client, red-eyed now from strain and lack of sleep, led the way with a powerful lantern to the door, and would have unlocked it at once had not Pons stayed his hand.

"Let us just examine the lock, Sir Richard."

He whipped out his magnifying glass, motioned for the light, which our client held high upon the heavy door, and bent over the lock. He looked at it carefully for some time; then crossed to the other side of the door, beckoning for the light, and studied the hinges.

"Ah," he murmured almost at once. "The hinges were removed. That then was the way entry was made." He turned and beckoned to Nason, a sallow-faced man in his fifties. "Unlock the door."

Thus bidden, Nason stepped forward, took the key from his master, and, while Sir Richard directed light upon the ponderous lock, manipulated the heavy key, which was fully ten inches in length. The door swung back, and immediately the charnel odour of the crypt swept over us from the deep blackness inside. The light reflected eerily on the coffins beyond.

Sir Richard took the lead and entered the vault. Inside, a brick ceiling was domed overhead, arched over to reach the floor on both sides. There was room enough for a double row of coffins, and we walked down between them—some obviously very old, since they were of the seventeenth century in origin—six on either side, until we came to the thirteenth, on which our client directed the light. This was clearly a coffin of the cheapest manufacture, and quite out of place among the others in the vault; so much was evident at a glance.

Pons now took the lantern, and methodically went around the coffin, scrutinizing it closely on all sides. Only when he had finished was he willing to open the coffin, seeing which Nason stepped well back. My own inclination was to do likewise, but I had no choice, for even as he was about raising the lid, Pons spoke.

"Your department, I think, Parker."

The stench of decomposition was almost overpowering. Pons betrayed none of his distaste for it save in the twitching of his nostrils and the grimness of his mouth. Our client, at facing his unwelcome tenant once again, went even paler than before. The light of the lantern disclosed all that remained of a portly man well past middle age. Decomposition had progressed to such a point that identification of the remains might indeed be difficult; yet it was possible to say. I concluded after a cursory examination, that the



fellow had come to his death by means of some blunt instrument which had smashed in his skull from the rear. He was a heavily bearded man, and in his beard, otherwise black, there were the beginnings of grey hair. His arms had been folded neatly across his breast, and he had been clad in a suit of brown tweed. He was not a tall man, nor yet small; he measured approximately five feet six inches. The past winter having been cold, decomposition would not have progressed to the stage of revealing so much of the skeleton if the body had been in the vault for only six months; in my opinion, the body had been in its present resting place for at least nine months.

So much I could tell Pons and our client. Having done so, I stepped back and Pons in turn bent to the gruesome examination. He looked in vain for identifying marks on the clothing, and reached with great care into all visible pockets, none of which gave up contents. It was only when Pons felt about under the remains that he brought forth what appeared to me to be a few tiny fragments of coloured paper; these he put into one of the small envelopes he carried from time to time for just such a purpose as this. By assiduous search, he discovered a few more such pieces before he was ready to abandon further examination, and covered the remains in the thirteenth coffin once again.

We lost no time leaving the vault, and breathed the air outside once more with gratitude. Standing before the locked door of the vault, our client turned to Pons.

"What must I do now, Mr. Pons?" he asked. "I hesitate to call the police."

"Nevertheless, the police must be notified. However, it can do no harm to wait yet a little while—the corpse is not likely to move. And nothing more will be disclosed by the body in its present state than its state in a day or two hence. Let us repair to some place where we can rest. Perhaps there is an inn at Stroud?"

"Mr. Pons, Chetley Old Place is at your disposal," said our client.

"There is no danger that we may disturb your aunt, Sir Richard?"

"I doubt it."

"What, incidentally, is ailing her?"

"Her doctor tells me that she has a combination of diseases common to her advanced age."

"She has been ill for some time, then?"

"Indeed she has. She has been ailed for two months."

Pons nodded absently, stood for a moment tugging at the lobe of his left ear, and then started toward the car, remarking that it would be best to get to bed before returning early in the morning to London, where my practise demanded my presence, since I had failed to notify my *locum* that I might be away from the city.

Once in the room to which Sir Richard had shown us, Pons turned to me, his face quickened with the excitement of the chase. "What a pretty puzzle, eh, Parker?" he cried. "What do you make of it?"

"Murder, certainly."

"Most foul, indeed! No more?"

"Well, one could hardly ask for a better place of concealment. Quite likely had it been anyone but Sir Richard, the thirteenth coffin would never have been opened or perhaps even challenged."

"You saw nothing odd in the choice of the Chetley vault?"

"Any other vault would have done as well."

"Capital! my dear fellow. That is precisely the point. Why this one? I submit that whoever made such fell use of it knew that it was advantageously reached and well out of sight of both house and highway; that, moreover, it was seldom visited by members of the family, and thus peculiar to his need."

"I should imagine that several hundred people knew of its existence," I said, not without some asperity.

"Granted. But even 'several hundred' is a limiting factor. There were no identifying marks on the clothing. Does that not suggest to you that whoever deposited the corpse in that place might have thought identification possible by some member of the family?"

"Perhaps."

"Reluctantly spoken, and without spirit," said Pons, a vexing smile on his thin lips. "A man well past middle age, you said. This suggests nothing to you?"

"My dear fellow, why should it?"

"Why indeed!"

He took from his pocket the envelope he had used in the crypt, looked about for a piece of white paper, and, finding a sheet of writing paper in the drawer of a small desk in our room, he dumped the contents of the envelope thereon. I looked down at a little pile of veined blue fragments, having very much the appearance of brittle onion-skin paper.

"What in the world is that, Pons?"

"That is what I hope to discover," he answered.

So saying, he drew up a chair and began with infinite patience to try to fit the various fragments together. After watching him at this well-nigh hopeless task for a minute or two, I left his side, with the announcement that I, for one, intended to sleep, and he could do what he liked. Since he was doing so, he made no reply.

When I awoke an hour after dawn, I found Pons already up.

"I suppose you have found the murderer," I said testily.

"Perhaps not quite. We shall see when once we have had a look at a heavy man of some five and a half feet in height, well past middle age, bearded, and very probably a lepidopterist."

"Ah, that blue paper!" I retorted.

"It is not paper."

I went over and looked down at the result of Pons's nocturnal labour. What he had put together on the white paper out of the fragments he had assembled from the coffin looked like all that remained of one wing of some insect. A moth? But no, it was not that.

"Why, it looks like a butterfly!" I cried.

"Indeed, and you are right, Parker," he said. "It is such a discovery as one on which to construct the entire meaning and *modus operandi* of the crime. Have you ever seen its like before?"

I confessed that I had not.

"I thought as much. Unless I am sadly mistaken, these are the remains of a Mazarine Blue, a rare immigrant. Less than a hundred have been found in the British Isles in the past hundred and ten years, and of these, no less than twenty were captured in the year 1825 alone. That should give you some indication of how rare this butterfly has been since then. A member of the sub-family *Plebennae*, I think. But then, I am no expert. I shall need to call on Lord Kerner, who is the recognized authority in London."

"But how came such a rarity in the place where you found it?"

"Ah! that is the question, Parker. None but a lepidopterist is likely to have possessed a Mazarine Blue. And a large number of those which have been taken are undoubtedly in public collections. We are thus limited, for obvious reasons, to a collector within not too great a radius of the immediate Cotswold country where we find ourselves this morning. And is it not a lovely morning!" he added, peering from the window.

Indeed, the view from the window was the epitome of England in all her rural beauty, for the hill slopes, the tidy fields and pastures, the blue beeches and birch trees among the pines, at this hour wreathed in rising mists, and the dew gleaming in the patches of sunlight conveyed instantly both the essence of this green isle and the freshness of the season in the country. Pons, however, did not give even this enchanting view his undivided attention, for, as I moved closer to him, he lowered his voice and spoke rapidly.

"Before we go, Parker, do contrive to have a look at our client's aunt. I am curious especially to know how long she may linger."

"Surely you do not suspect him or her . . . ?"

"Fie, Parker! You are far ahead of the game. We have not yet made such progress!"

"But you were only a little while ago describing the murderer," I protested. Pons clucked impatiently. "I did not identify him as such. Our first quarry—a lepidopterist. I submit that no true collector would permit a specimen of the Mazarine Blue to escape him, no matter what the circumstance."

"Perhaps he did not see the butterfly."

"That is always a possibility. Or seeing, did not care."

"Then he was not the collector."

"Ah, Parker, it warms me to observe such definite proof of my good influence. The faculty of observation is basic before the science of deduction can be employed. But I am persuaded to believe you, too, now have all the facts, and should be able to apply your experience to the solution of this gruesome little problem. Let us just look up our host."

Sir Richard was up and waiting for us. He looked haggard. I inquired solicitously about his aunt at the breakfast-table, and found it unnecessary to suggest that I look in on her, for he himself asked whether I would care to do so.

We were soon thereafter on our way to London in our client's car, though he did not accompany us. Pons, as usual, sat in deep thought. How he could close his eyes to the scenic beauty of that fair land I could never hope to understand; but so he did, slumped into one corner of the tonneau, and while I took delight in the ever-changing view, he sat in brooding silence, unaware of all else but the problem in hand. Presently, however, he opened one eye halfway and shot a glance at me.

"The aunt, Parker. How did you find her?"

"She has at least a week. But if you are thinking that anything about her condition is unnatural, put it out of your mind. She is dying of the debilities of old age — of just what Sir Richard said, a complex of senile diseases."

Pons waved one hand impatiently. "Sir Richard, at any rate, is safe from harm for at least a week — if indeed harm impends. I am persuaded that it does."

"You gave him no warning," I protested indignantly.

"There is plenty of time for that."

He relapsed into silence again.

"I must say," I said presently, "I am extremely confused by the various and apparently unconnected directions in which you have shown an interest. What has the old lady's condition to do with Sir Richard's safety? Why is the Mazarine Blue of such signal importance? And what have we to do with a collector of butterflies when it is manifest that no collector would ever have allowed a Mazarine Blue to escape him? — in your own words."

"Ah, Parker, surely you jest! The answers are so obvious that not even you could be unaware of them!"

If he had wished to silence me, he could not have chosen a better weapon.

We reached our quarters at 7B Praed Street just before one o'clock, and, though I was then ravenously hungry, for all that we had had breakfast at Chetley Old Place, Pons did not wish even to look at food. He lost no time in making an appointment to see Lord Kerners, and then turned upon his files, which were shortly scattered about his chair, as he sought the information he expected to find among them.

"Ah, here we are," he said at last. "'Conviction of Leonard Jones.' Here is the whole sorry mess. Sir Malcolm was adamant about punishment, and the young man seemed incorrigible. There was, in any case, an appreciable prejudice on Leonard's part — he felt resentment against his wealthier relatives. Four years in Borstal, thereafter three years knocking about London — I seem to recall meeting him once in Soho — and then at last his tragic end."

"There is no doubt about his end, then? Down off the coast of New Zealand in a storm, I think Sir Richard said."

"Ah, Parker — you have been chronicling too many of these little adventures. I fear there is no question about Leonard's death. The ship went down within sight of shore. Some hands were saved, but

neither Leonard nor his father was among them. The area was searched for some time, and anyone reaching the beach would certainly have been noticed."

"Mistaken identity, then," I suggested.

"To what end," Pons shook his head. "No, no, that is entirely too fanciful, though I agree that the probability would be bound to occur, since Leonard, at least, knew very well about the burial vault. So did his father and his uncle."

"There is an uncle who still survives."

"He has been out of touch with the family for ten years," replied Pons. "Besides, if his motive were vengeance, surely he is starting late to accomplish it, since Sir Richard's father has been dead these past six years."

"The fact remains that something dastardly is afoot," I insisted.

"We are in perfect agreement as to that," answered Pons dryly.

Soon after, Pons left for his appointment with Lord Keners, and I went on professional calls I could put off no longer. It was not until that evening that we met again, when I entered our rooms to find Pons just turning from the telephone, explaining that he had put through a trunk-call to Dartmoor Prison to make some inquiries.

"You saw Lord Keners?" I pressed him.

"I did. There is no doubt about it. The fragments are of a Mazarine Blue. There is sufficient evidence to indicate that the entire butterfly was very probably pressed beneath the corpse. Having had my own guess verified, I made inquiry about the number of Mazarine Blues known to be in private collections, particularly in the Cotswolds and the vicinity of Stroud. Would it surprise you to learn that one Edward Jones is a lepidopterist?"

"Nothing you turn up can surprise me. But 'Edward Jones' is a common name. Can it be Sir Richard's surviving relative?"

"We shall see. He lives at Evesham on the Avon, which is not too far from the ancestral estate of Chetlev Old Place. That is surely within easy reach of Stroud, and it must have occurred to you that the transportation of a body, even by night, becomes increasingly hazardous with every mile. I submit that a journey from London could hardly be accomplished without attracting someone's attention. But a journey from anywhere within a radius of Stroud that includes Evesham is far more likely to be accomplished without a hitch. A visit to Evesham is indicated."

Without waiting for my reply, Pons drew a railway guide to him. "Let me see—we can take a train for Evesham from Paddington by way of Oxford at eight-ten tomorrow morning. We shall reach Evesham just after eleven."

"You are coming back to my theory," I said, not without a note of triumph.

Pons favoured me with an enigmatic smile. "I shall be most interested to learn how a collector could lose a Mazarine Blue with equanimity," he said.

We reached Evesham about 11:20 the following day.

No one who knew Pons was likely to have recognized him, for he was clad in faintly rustic style and carried a leather satchel and killing bottle with him. By presenting himself as a fellow collector, he expected to be received with considerably less suspicion by Edward Jones at the address Lord Kerners had given him. The place we sought was a modest but secluded dwelling at the north end of the town, not far from the Abbey Manor House; it was surrounded by iron palings, from the gate of which a flagstone walk led to a tree-embowered terrace. The day being warm, the door of the house, visible from the gate, stood partly ajar. So much we saw in a brief reconnoitering journey, for Pons was not yet ready to go in.

"Before we set foot in that idyllic scene, let us just go round to the police station and make ourselves known," he said.

"In case you should have to produce your revolver?" I asked. "I saw you take it."

"Ah, Parker, you are indeed growing more observant. Soon I shall have no secrets left, and my poor powers will be exposed for what they are."

At the police station, Pons introduced himself to Sergeant Moore, who was at this hour in charge. He was a heavy, florid faced man, who, once he was convinced of Pons's identity, was eager to be as co-operative as possible.

"I should first like to know whether any local tradesman has reported the theft of a coffin within the past year," asked Pons.

Sergeant Moore scratched his head. "Not as I know of, Mr. Pons. And I think I'd know that if it'd been reported."

"Let us say, then, the sale in peculiar circumstances—not necessarily only within the last year," pressed Pons.

Sergeant Moore's face broke into a grin. "Why, you must mean Mr. Jones!" he cried. "He bought himself a coffin four, five years ago, and he's been sleepin' in it ever since. Oh, but he's a queer one, all right!"

Pons smiled. His next request was somewhat more sobering. Could the Sergeant detail a man to follow us, to respond to Pons's signal?

The Sergeant could and did, and when we left the police station, we were followed by Constable Peter Maugham, who, following Pons's instructions, remained as unobtrusive as possible, staving a hundred yards or so behind us.

This time Pons went forthrightly up the flagstone walk to the door of Edward Jones's house and gave the bell pull a prolonged ring. Then we stood until footsteps approached from inside and a bearded face was thrust out at us from the dusk of the house.

"What can I do for you, gentlemen?"

"Have I the honour of speaking to Mr. Edward Jones?" asked Pons.

The old gentleman nodded benignly. "You do, sir."

"The well-known lepidopterist, whose collection of butterflies is so widely respected?" continued Pons.

There was a brief, suspicious moment of silence. The old fellow's bull-like neck turned as he moved his head a little so that his narrowed eyes measured Pons from head to toe. "My collection," he said "I *am* sorry, sir, to have put you to any trouble. I sold my collection, a good three years ago - perhaps even more."

"Come, sir, you jest. No true collector could bring himself to part with his life's work!"

"Nevertheless, sir, I sold my collection." Then, after a moment of hesitation, Jones added, "Do not let me keep you from your business, sir. Good-day, gentlemen."

He closed the door softly but firmly in our faces.

"A rude old man," I said, as we walked toward the street.

Pons's eyes danced. He walked almost too rapidly for me to keep up, and, as soon as we were out of sight of the house, he waited for Constable Maugham to catch up.

"Dr. Parker and I are doubling around to the back of the house. Will you return to the front, Maugham, and arrest Mr. Jones if he attempts to leave?"

"Arrest him, Mr. Pons?" Constable Maugham was incredulous. "But on what charge?"

"The charge is murder. Have no fear. I will substantiate it. Come, we have no time to lose."

"Pons, this is madness," I protested as I hastened after him, where he made his way around to the rear of Jones's property.

We reached there just in time. As we came up, the burly old man we had last seen at the front door was opening the back garden gate. He was red-faced and obviously in grievous haste, for he had scarcely paused to snatch more than enough of his belongings to fill a small handbag. Before he caught sight of us, Pons had his revolver in his hand.

"Not so fast, Alfred," said Pons. "I thought you had recognized me."

Our quarry stood where he was, cursing. "Next time, Pons," he muttered furiously and ominously.

"There won't be another time, Alfred. It's murder this time. The murder of Edward Jones, committed nine months ago. Parker, just summon Constable Maugham."

"There was really no other alternative," said Pons as we sat in our compartment on the return trip to London, "though I suppose the crux of the matter was the delay in the matter of vengeance. This in itself posed no great problem and actually served to cast still further doubt on the highly theoretical question of the possible escape of Leonard Jones and his father in that shipwreck off New Zealand's coast. Had they been engaged in this, they might have been expected to move far sooner. I was left then with Leonard's companions in that robbery of a decade ago. Hugo Mays had been released at the same time as Leonard, and had gone his separate way. Alfred served his full time, and was released last year. Nine years, you will recall, Parker. The coincidence did not escape me — last year was the ninth year, and it was immediately after his release that Alfred set in motion the events which culminated in the murder of Edward Jones.

"No doubt Leonard had remarked on his resemblance to his uncle Edward. Doubtless, too, Leonard had set forth with admirable clarity his feelings about the Chetleys, so that Alfred was fully armed with all the information he needed when he left Dartmoor. Besides, Alfred surely knew of the death of Leonard and his father; he may also have known that Edward Jones was the only surviving relative after Sir Richard and his Aunt Agatha — and she was dying. Edward Jones offered him a suitable victim — an elderly

man, bushy-bearded like himself, living alone in a secluded house. Perhaps he even posed as a fellow collector to obtain entrance. And then to find that his intended victim was one of those eccentrics who are given to sleeping in coffins—was that not temptation with a vengeance? I submit that Alfred killed Jones on his very first visit and took his place; I submit that the old man was showing him his collection of butterflies at the time of his murder, which accounts for the presence of the rare Mazarine Blue.

“Alfred’s goal was perhaps worth the gamble in his eyes. His victim’s living was modest, but enough. But the game might have been extended to win a genuine prize—Chetley Old Place and the entire estate. Once Aunt Agatha had departed this life, a convenient accident to Sir Richard would have left the spurious Edward Jones the only heir. Could this have been Leonard’s hope, fallen on Alfred’s fertile brain?

“I fancy this is Alfred’s last journey. The police will turn Spilsbury on poor Edward Jones’s remains, and that with such evidence as we have gathered will complete the case and send Alfred to the noose.”

The Adventure of the Red Leech

WHEN I LOOK over my notes on the riddles my friend Solar Pons explored in the course of the summer and autumn of 1931, I am struck by their diversity, ranging as they do from the curious affair of Ashness Bridge to the strange adventure of Symond's Yat, from sanguine murder to cunning theft. Yet perhaps the mystery surrounding the death of David Cosby takes precedence over them all.

We were introduced to it one August day at high noon. We had been walking that morning along the Edgware Road and Pons had been entertaining and instructing me with the exercise of his extraordinary faculty for observation and deduction. As we turned into Number 7B, a somewhat troubled landlady appeared before us.

"Oh, Mr. Pons, there's a lady waiting to see you," she said apologetically. "I showed her into your rooms. Perhaps I shouldn't have done it, but she seemed so disturbed, and she did beg so to talk with you."

Pons's eyes brightened. "We shall just see what is troubling her, Mrs. Johnson," said Pons. "We have been idle all of three days. I chafe under idleness."

Our client sat, evidently, just where she had been put by Mrs. Johnson, her gloved hands folded on a reticule in her lap. She sprang to her feet at our entrance, her dark eyes moving from one face to the other, and fixing unerringly upon my companion.

"Forgive me, Mr. Pons. I had to come!"

"Pray be seated, Miss. . . ."

"Cosby, Mr. Pons. Agatha Cosby."

"You have had a long ride from the country to bring me something that has disturbed you," said Pons tranquilly.

She gave a satisfied little nod and sat down. She was a small, sprightly woman certainly around fifty years of age, though no hint of grey as yet showed in her ash-blond hair. Her fingers were ringless, which was no doubt the basis for Pons's conclusion that she was unmarried, and her trim black slippers—which were sturdy footwear rather than dainty—showed dust, suggesting that she had

been riding in an open carriage and had neither home nor hotel to return to, in order to wait upon Pons's return to our quarters. She was modestly dressed in an almost Victorian fashion, and in uniform black, from shoes to hat.

"You have recently suffered a bereavement, Miss Cosby."

"My brother."

"Suddenly."

"Yes. It was about his death - and the events that preceded it that I came to see you. I seem to have become involved, sir."

So saying, she took from her reticule a little cardboard box and handed it to Pons.

Pons opened it. A slight cry of surprise escaped him at sight of its contents. I moved closer. What lay there, only crudely pinned to the bottom of the box, was a repulsive worm - a red leech.

Pons flashed dancing eyes at me. "Have you ever seen its like before, Parker?"

"Never."

Pons looked toward our client, his eyes narrowed. "Posted to you from Rye, I see."

"That is where I live - on the outskirts of the town. *We* lived, I should say, for I am the last of the family. I received this in the post early today, and in view of what happened to my brother, I thought it best to seek help. I know something of your work, Mr. Pons, and I hope you will be able to help me. I am frightened. You see, my brother died after receiving one of these worms."

"Also in the post?"

"Yes, Mr. Pons."

"From Rye?"

"No, indeed, Mr. Pons. Posted from Paris."

"Ah," said Pons. "Pray tell us about it." He lit his pipe and leaned upon the mantel, waiting.

Miss Cosby bit her lip and wrinkled her forehead. "I hardly know where to begin, Mr. Pons," she said apologetically, "but I suppose it is with the arrival of the post. It was ten days ago that the little box came for David. Because I was curious, I managed to be in the library when he opened it. Mr. Pons, I was hardly prepared for the effect of the worm on my brother. He gave a great, hoarse cry - dropped the box, and fell back, struck dumb!

"Of course, I didn't understand at once. I saw only that my brother was very ill, and telephoned for Dr. Lansdown. He said my brother had had an apoplectic seizure, a 'cerebral accident' he called it. I didn't, therefore, connect the box and the worm with my

brother immediately. So I destroyed them. It wasn't until after I received this that I began to suspect there must have been some connection between the worm and my brother's seizure. He lay only semi-conscious for three days - precisely where he was, in his chair, for Dr. Lansdown feared to move him. All to no avail, sir - he died at the end of the third day. And he had begun to improve, too - he was talking a little."

"Ah! What did he say?"

"I fear his mind was affected, Mr. Pons. He seemed so desperately anxious to tell me something, yet all he seemed able to say was something about our old kennels - we kept dogs at one time, Mr. Pons - and he muttered about our dog Scottie. But we had given up the kennels years ago, and Scottie has been dead four years."

"Nothing more?"

"Nothing, Mr. Pons. That was all he spoke about. It was maddening. His eyes looked so desperately toward the wall on the side of the grounds where the dogs were housed as if he were trying to summon them from the past. I listened in vain for something of meaning. There was nothing."

She fell silent. For a few moments Pons, too, was silent, drawing thoughtfully at his pipe, and seemingly unaware of our client's raising her dainty handkerchief to protect her nostrils from the reek of the abominable shag he smoked.

"I take it your brother was a retired man," said Pons then.

"Yes, Mr. Pons. He was in the importing business and had an office in Hanoi, Indo-China. He came home seven years ago. He was then fifty-three, and he was moderately wealthy. He spent his time reading and working in his garden. He took pride in his delphiniums. He went out but little - except to the flower shows. You don't suppose," she ventured, looking anxiously at Pons, "that the leech had anything to do with his flowers?"

"I should be inclined to doubt it," replied Pons dryly.

"Nor was there anything in his papers to give me any clue to the meaning of the leech, Mr. Pons. Anything that is, that I could understand." She smiled diffidently, reached into her reticule, and brought forth a folded sheet of paper. "This was there. I concluded that my brother was at work on some kind of mathematical problem."

Pons glanced at the paper and handed it, without comment, to me.

It was certainly not a problem, I saw at a glance, but an

arrangement of numbers that evidently held some meaning for our client's late brother.

"90.33.7 117.17.5 131.34.2 289.6.4 314.10.9 368.12.1
371.6.8 - 416.7.5 - 439.6.5 - 446.28.2 - 451.3.5."

"I would have thought nothing of it," continued our client, "but it was in an envelope and carefully put away. Can you read it, Mr. Pons?"

"I will retain it, if I may, together with the cardboard box."

"I have the wrapping here, too," said Miss Cosby, almost as an afterthought. So saying, she took another neatly folded paper from her reticule and handed it to Pons.

"Your brother must surely have had something more with which to occupy his time than gardening," ventured Pons.

"Oh, he was a great reader, Mr. Pons. For a while he used to read the papers, but in the past two years it was all books. He was in the habit of making notes on what he read, but he discontinued that, finally. My brother had an extensive library. Of course, part of it was my father's—the nucleus, you might say. So he only added to it."

"You have always lived in Rye?"

"We were born in that house, Mr. Pons."

"Someone in your family was previously in the business of importing?"

"Well, we did have a great uncle who lived in Hanoi until he died there ten years ago. I don't particularly know what he did. My brother had been in the bank in Rye, but he disliked that work and he had some little trouble, so he left it and went into importing in Hanoi."

"Was your brother known to have had heart trouble of any kind?" asked Pons.

"He suffered from a rise in blood pressure, Mr. Pons, of some years' standing."

"Since his return from the east? Or before?"

"Since."

"And was this widely known?"

"I believe only the doctor, my brother, and myself were aware of it." Our client clasped her hands together and appealed to Pons.

"Oh, Mr. Pons. Do you think I am in danger? I am so frightened!"

"Pray do not be unduly alarmed, Miss Cosby. Dr. Parker and I will be at your home before dark tonight. We will plan to spend the

night. It would not surprise me if the sender of that curious message were to call."

"Oh, do not say so!" cried our client, her eyes widening in alarm.

"Fear not, Miss Cosby. Dr. Parker and I will be on hand."

After our client had departed, Pons sat for a few minutes with the three items she had brought ranged before him on the table, regarding them thoughtfully. I watched him covertly, and observed that presently he took up a page of notepaper and began to jot down something. Looking over his shoulder, I saw that he had rearranged the numerals of the late David Cosby's mathematical jottings into three columns—

90	33	7
117	17	5
131	34	2
289	6	4
314	10	9
368	12	1
371	6	8
416	7	5
439	6	5
446	28	2
451	3	5

Pons leaned back, his eyes dancing. "What do you make of it, Parker?"

"It's a cipher of some kind."

"Elementary. Does the arrangement of the numerals suggest nothing to you?"

I looked at them long and hard. "I am no cryptologist."

"Tut, tut! One need not be." He pushed the paper aside and drew over the cardboard box. "The leech, then."

"I see that it is a red leech, no more," I said, a trifle impatiently.

"I submit there is one distinctly odd feature to be observed," said Pons with that irritating air of harbouring some secret knowledge.

"I have seen dozens of leeches in my practise," I said, stiffly.

"But not, I'll wager, one like this. There are various members of the Hirudinea, which belong to the Chaetopod worms. The majority of them are aquatic, but there are parasitical land leeches

common to the tropics. This leech is one such. There are leeches of a brown colour, of green, black, yellow, olive. *Herpobdella atomaria* *Nephelis vulgaris* is reddishly transparent in young specimens and many have a reddish hue when fresh blood is visible through their skins. *Hemidepsus marginata* is somewhat pink in colour, with strikingly red dots an aquatic leech which particularly preys on ducks. One or two others – notably *Haemodipsus* – have red stripes. But there is no such red leech as this."

"How can you say so? It lies before us!" I protested.

"Say rather a leech of an obviously red colour lies here," said Pons.

"You are playing with words."

"On the contrary. This leech is not red by nature. It would appear to be brown in hue. The red has been added."

"Painted!"

"So it would appear."

"But how then could a red leech have any significance to anyone if there is no such leech?" I cried.

"Precisely. That is the problem. Particularly such significance as to bring on a fatal seizure. I submit, however, that it was not intended to bring on such a seizure. I fancy it was meant to convey a message which perhaps only David Cosby could understand – or someone presumably privy to the knowledge that gives it meaning."

"Like his sister."

Pons nodded. "It would then have been a message Cosby never expected to receive," he went on. "Only such a message would have so startled him."

"A death threat!"

"Gently, Parker! We are not yet justified in that assumption. Let us suppose for the nonce that it was intended to convey a certain intelligence Cosby had no reason to believe he would ever receive. It may have been meant to inaugurate or foretell a chain of events which might very well have followed had Cosby survived his seizure, which, I assume from our client's description was paralytic in nature, perhaps a cerebral thrombosis."

I agreed.

"The sender was obviously approaching England from some tropical country, the leeches being tropical in origin, though he might very well have obtained them in Paris. He mailed Cosby from Paris, and took his time in getting to Rye. Once there, he learned of Cosby's death. He learned also that his sister survived

him and concluded that the business he had so dramatically announced to Cosby might be taken up with her. He does not yet know that his conclusion is in error."

"Do we?"

"I think we may safely believe that Miss Cosby is as mystified as we are at this moment—perhaps more so," he added enigmatically.

I refused to play his little game any longer.

Thereupon he took up the wrapping which had covered the cardboard box and handed it to me. "What do you make of that? You know my methods."

I studied it for a few moments with care. "It is written in a strong hand with a broad pen," I said. "The writer is certainly a man." Encouraged by Pons's smile, I went on. "He wrote this in some haste, but he would seem not to be ordinarily careless, for he went to more pains with his leech than he did with this address. The paper would appear to be ordinary market paper, obtainable in any shop; the absorption of the ink makes the letters seem broader than in fact they were at the writing of them."

"Capital, Parker, capital!" cried Pons. "It cheers me to be provided with such evidence of your progress in ratiocination."

I bowed to acknowledge his praise.

He got to his feet abruptly. "Now, if you will excuse me, I have one or two little inquiries to make, and then, if you can spare the time, we are off to Rye."

Our client's home stood near the foot of the knoll on which the ancient town of Rye stands, not quite at the edge of Romney Marsh, on the far side of Rye from the coast, and in the middle of grounds that covered at least four or five acres, devoted, as was apparent in the late afternoon sunlight, to lawns, trees, and gardens. A low stone wall shut it off from the road, and shrubbery outlined the boundaries of the property. Here and there stood statuary—all, save for two pieces, Oriental; the two were a conventional Venus and a bust of Queen Victoria over against the stone wall, as though the Queen were the patroness of the gardens, for a bed of roses was arranged not far before the bust. The Oriental pieces were of just such nature as might be expected of someone who had been engaged in importing primitive art and artifacts from Southeast Asia.

All this we took in as we made our leisurely approach up the cobblestone walk to the entrance.

Our client had seen us, and threw open the door as we came up to it.

"Oh, Mr. Pons!" she cried. "I am so glad you are here. I dreaded the coming of night."

"The anticipation of what one fears is always worse than what one anticipates, Miss Cosby," said Pons.

"May I show you to your rooms?"

"It is too early for that, thank you," said Pons. "I would like to see the room in which your brother received the parcel on the day of his seizure."

Without a word, Miss Cosby turned and led the way down the hall to the library, the entire outer wall of which was lined with shelves from floor to ceiling, and the shelves crowded with books of all description, though I saw at a glance that our client's late brother had been much given to sets of authors.

Miss Cosby pointed to an easy-chair drawn up beside a Queen Anne table and a reading lamp. "It was just there, Mr. Pons."

"The chair, I take it, was in that position?"

"Yes, Mr. Pons."

"And the kennels were off on that side of the house?" Pons gestured toward the outer wall.

"Yes. They were disused, except for Scottie, when David returned from Indo-China. The very first thing he did was to move Scottie, tear down the kennels, and put in his rose garden. I don't know who will tend it now he's gone, but I suppose it will fall to me."

Pons nodded absently. He looked from the chair to the bookshelves, and then wandered idly over to the shelves.

"Your brother seems to have been a devoted reader of our classical authors."

"Oh, he was, Mr. Pons. Some of those older sets, of course, belonged to our parents. My father, too, read books voraciously."

"Hardy," mused Pons. "A complete set. Commendable, indeed! And Conrad! What other writer in our time has so effectively portrayed the sea? Unless it were William Hodgson, who had an eye for its terrors! And here are Dickens, Scott, Thackeray, Dumas — one would expect to find them here."

He walked slowly along the shelves of books, scrutinizing their titles. Now and then he paused to take down a volume and open it, and make a terse comment or two, while our client favoured him with puzzled glances, looking to me for assurance that Pons was about his quest.

"Who is Dickens's peer at the creation of memorable characters?" he asked. "And who so loves the English countryside as Hardy? Though he has an eye for the dark side of his fellowmen. Sir Walter is currently in eclipse, but I fancy the wheel of taste will turn again."

At length he selected a book and turned to our client. "And now, if you please, Miss Cosby, to our quarters."

Our client showed us to an ample room on the floor above, and, assuring us that dinner would not be long delayed, left us to ourselves.

"I never knew you to fancy Scott," I could not help saying.

"Ah, Parker—Sir Walter is among the most instructive of writers. One could do worse than have recourse to him for instruction in our history. He was a most meticulous writer. Consider this novel, for instance—there are a score of pages at the rear devoted to his notes on the text, all setting forth the historical basis for this story of Elizabeth and Leicester."

He settled down in an easy-chair, putting the book temporarily aside for some further study of the two papers left with him by Miss Cosby.

"Did your further inquiries add anything to what we learned from our client?" I asked before he became too deeply immersed in either the papers or the novel.

"Ah, very little of significance," he replied without looking up. "That little 'trouble' at the bank where Cosby worked before the Indo-China venture seems to have been some trivial speculations on his part. Nothing was ever proved. He left the bank quietly and went to the Orient. There he organized the Indo China Importing Company with some assistance from his late uncle, and apparently conducted a legitimate and profitable business, occasionally making trips into neighbouring countries to discover and buy artifacts, works of art, primitives, and the like. Then, after seventeen years, he sold his business and came back to England to lose himself here."

After but a cursory examination, he put the papers aside and took up the historical novel he had brought from the library. Thereafter he alternated between the papers and the novel until at last, after jotting down a few notes, he sat back with the book until Miss Cosby knocked on the door to announce dinner.

Over a substantial evening meal, Pons pressed his inquiry.

"You mentioned, Miss Cosby, that you believed your brother to

be moderately wealthy. You have had ample opportunity since his death to ascertain the facts."

"Yes, Mr. Pons, I have. He has left me comfortably situated for the rest of my life. The transfer of funds from Indo-China together with the sale of his business amounted to a considerable sum. His accounts at the bank are in excess of ten thousand pounds. Then there are other investments. In addition, my brother occasionally hinted at certain insurance against losses or something happening at the bank. This, however, has not come to light; if he had such a policy, we have not yet discovered it. My brother was secretive, and he was also extremely parsimonious, I am sorry to say. There were many times I would have found myself painfully short of funds if I had had to rely on him; fortunately, I never had to."

"I observed a handsome bed of roses as we came in," said Pons then.

"David was very proud of his roses. He was forever tending them. He put them in himself—but then, he has never had a gardener on the grounds. He did everything, Mr. Pons—everything. Of course, it was in part to save money—but primarily it was because he was convinced no one could do it as well as he."

"While he was in Indo-China, did you find him freely communicative?"

"It is odd you should ask, Mr. Pons," replied our client, "but that is one thing David could not be said to have been. He wrote very brief, terse letters."

"Did he speak of his associates?"

"Only on occasion of our uncle. Uncle helped him to get started, but my brother was evidently in complete charge of his business. Now it is conducted by a man named Goddard—Henry Goddard."

"But your brother certainly employed others. He would have needed someone to take charge of his office whenever he took trips into the interior for the works of primitive art he sold."

"I believe he employed three people. He mentioned that number. One was a clerk, one a bookkeeper—who was in charge when he was away, and one an assistant of some sort. He accompanied my brother in his buying trips."

The paucity of the food he ate betrayed the fact that Pons was hot upon some scent or other. I could not fathom, from the general nature of his questions, what it might be. He had learned nothing that he had not already discovered by inquiring about London

earlier in the day. Yet his face had never seemed more feral, with his keen eyes fixed on our client, and a duo of faint lines across his high brow.

I was not, however, prepared for his business-like manner at the end of the meal.

"Now, Miss Cosby," he said briskly, "it is quite dark. We shall need a lantern and a shovel."

Our client's jaw fell momentarily as she gazed at Pons in astonishment for an instant before she acquiesced.

"You will find both in the potting shed, Mr. Pons. Come, I will show you."

"Pray, permit me. We will be able to find our way."

"Very well, Mr. Pons. The shed is directly behind the house, at the edge of the grounds."

Once outside in the deepening dusk, Pons caught me by the arm and pressed a pistol into my hand. "It is quite possible that the house may be under surveillance, Parker. I need you to 'cover' me while I am at work. There is an ash tree on the west side of the house, not far from the rose garden. Beyond it is a clump of laurel bushes. Go now and take up your stance there. Wait upon me."

"You have deciphered Cosby's figures," I whispered.

"Alas! Sadly prosaic," he retorted, and slipped away.

I found my way to the ash tree without difficulty, and thence around the rose garden toward the growth of laurel along the stone wall at the western line of the Cosby property. There I concealed myself; I had indulged Pons's flair for the dramatic before; I would indulge it again.

I saw the light of the lantern spring up, and presently Pons came along, bearing the lantern in one hand, a shovel in the other. He came up to the ash tree and paused to take his bearings. I saw him fix his position before he stepped off five paces in a northeasterly direction. Then he took four sharply to the left in the direction of the bust of Queen Victoria, and was thus brought to the very edge of the rose garden. There he put the lantern down and dropped to his knees to examine the earth.

And there, presently, he began to dig.

He dug for a little while and paused to sound the hole he had made. Then he dug for a while again, and once more sounded the pit. And presently he must have heard something he expected to hear, for he worked far more carefully, digging around some

object. And at last he brought up a tin dispatch box a trifle more than six inches square. He put it on the ground next to the lantern and opened it. Whatever was in it shone and glittered—red.

But at that moment Pons was interrupted.

"I'll take that!" said a firm voice.

I saw standing in the lantern's glow a slender man of medium height. He had a revolver in his hand, pointed at Pons.

Leaving the box with its contents where it stood, Pons leisurely came to his feet, lifting his lantern high to reveal a man of middle age.

"Mr. Leach, I presume?" said Pons. "Known to his intimates as 'Red' Leach?"

I saw now that the fellow had a red beard and a shock of dark red hair.

"I don't know you," he said anxiously.

"My name is Solar Pons, though I doubt you have had occasion to hear it in Southeast Asia. The gentleman covering you with his gun from the laurels is Dr. Lyndon Parker."

Leach wavered a little.

"Good-evening, Mr. Leach," I called out.

A wild look came into the fellow's face.

"As far as I know, you have done nothing illegal, Mr. Leach," continued Pons imperturbably. "Pray do not act on impulse now. You have come to see Miss Cosby on a matter of business, obviously of importance to you. Let us all go into the house together."

Leach stood as if struck dumb.

"But first," said Pons, thrusting forth his hand, "your weapon."

For a few moments they stood, immobile.

"Come, man, what do you say?" demanded Pons.

Slowly, as if mesmerized by the turn of events, Leach handed his weapon to Pons.

"And now, Mr. Leach," said Pons briskly, "pick up that ruby—it is certainly the largest I have ever seen—and come along."

"You'll trust me with it?" asked Leach in an incredulous voice.

"I daresay you have a claim on it," replied Pons.

"It is the Eye of Buddha," said Leach.

"Miss Cosby will want to hear about it," said Pons. "Let us go around by the front door and announce ourselves properly. Parker, put up your pistol, that's a good fellow."

Leach walked with a bad limp. Perhaps because of it he made no effort to make a break but went along docilely enough between



Pons and me—past the ash tree, around the house, and to the front entrance, where Pons put down the shovel and the lantern and sounded the bell.

Miss Cosby herself came to the door and threw it open. Her eyes widened in surprise at the sight of three men, where she had expected but two.

"Miss Cosby, may I present Mr. Leach—familiarily known as 'Red' Leach," said Pons.

"Oh!" she cried, one hand flying to her lips.

"Mr. Leach is carrying what your brother buried at the edge of his rose garden on his return from Indo-China—his 'insurance' of which you could find no trace," continued Pons, pressing past her. "I believe he has a claim on it. If you are not too upset to hear his story, we will all listen to it."

"Do come in," she cried, finding her voice again. "Indeed, I *must* hear it."

Seen in the well-lit room, Leach was revealed as a man of middle age, whose grooming belied the gruffness of his voice. He had pleasant blue eyes that wrinkled at the corners, and his beard, I saw now, was affected to conceal a scar along one side of his jaw.

"I didn't mean anything but to frighten old Davey," he said apologetically, "to let him know I was still in the land of the living. No more than that. Except to prepare him for my coming to claim what was mine."

"And what was that, Mr. Leach?" asked Miss Cosby.

"At least the half of this ruby—and some of my back pay. You don't know?"

"No, Mr. Leach."

"Ah, well, Miss, then I owe you an apology."

Miss Cosby smiled tremulously. "Do go on, Mr. Leach. How did my brother come by this ruby?"

"I was his assistant, Miss Cosby," said Leach. "I went with him on his trips. I knew the places, you might say. I worked for his uncle—begging your pardon, your uncle too, Miss Cosby—and then I worked for him, after the old man died. We went all through that country buying primitive art pieces—like the kind he's got out there in the garden, and other work for which he could get a good price. That was the way he made his money—by getting ten times what he paid for a piece, sometimes a hundred times what he paid for it.

"We'd heard talk of the Eye of Buddha years before. Your uncle knew of the stone fixed in the forehead of a statue of Buddha lost in

the jungles of Siam. There's little to tell of it, except that once, during a storm, we lost the trail, and blundered for miles through the forest and came upon it. We pried and chipped it out. That was the long of it. The short of it was that on the way out we were attacked by a party of priests and I was wounded. Then Davey said, 'It's every man for himself!' and ran for it. He got away. I didn't. But they didn't kill me. They took me prisoner, and healed me somewhat, and made me work for them. Over six years! I got away at last, and set out to find Davey. I sent him the leech to let him know, to get him ready to pay me what I had coming to me."

"You poor man!" cried our client sympathetically. "You may certainly keep that ruby. Whatever would I do with it?"

"Thank you, Miss Cosby."

"And in the morning you had better come around and we will discuss whatever back pay is coming to you."

Mr. Leach, his eyes quickening, favoured her with a lingering glance, which she returned.

Pons rose with alacrity.

"You will excuse us, Miss Cosby. We will just walk Mr. Leach around to his lodgings and catch the 9:55 train for London."

"I fancy," said Pons with a smile, once we were seated in our compartment on our way to London, "Mr. Leach may have found more than back pay to compensate him for whatever misery was his in Siam."

"Bother Leach!" I cried. "What sent you to dig up the rose garden?"

"I thought that obvious," answered Pons. "It is no credit to your powers of observation that you should have to ask Sir Walter Scott, of course."

"Fantastic!"

"Not at all. Cosby tried to tell his sister, but she, being less imaginative than he, grievously misunderstood him to be talking of the kennels and the dog, Scottie. True, he was looking in the direction of the kennels. He was also looking toward the bookshelves. Assuming that his mind had been affected, she made none but the most cursory attempt to understand him. What he was trying to say was '*Kenilworth*' and 'Scott' Sir Walter, not a similarly named dog."

"It was *Kenilworth* that contained the solution to Cosby's simple cipher. You will recall that I directed your attention to the

arrangement of the numerals. Out of a certain innate stubbornness integral to your nature, you affected not to see. Yet it was painfully evident that the cipher was based upon a book. The first line of numerals ranged from 90 to 451, the second did not exceed 34, the third did not go beyond 9. What more obvious than the pages of a book, the lines on a page, the words in a line? In all such cases, of course, however simple the cipher may be, it is essential that the book be known so that pages, lines, and words can be set down. Our client, however obtuse, nevertheless managed to supply the title of the book once I chanced upon it on the shelves. The message, thus disclosed, proved to be spare and direct. 'Look under ash five steps northeast over four left toward Queen.' The Queen, in the case, being the bust of her late Majesty, Victoria.

"Miss Cosby, I fear, is only just beginning to understand that her late brother was one-tenth a scoundrel. I should have preferred one of a dimension closer to nine-tenths!"

The Adventure of the Lost Holiday

AS I CAME from my bath that evening, I saw my friend Solar Pons bent attentively at the wireless. He had evidently just come in, and gone directly over to listen to the news, for he had not yet removed his Inverness. He turned, saw me, and smiled, with a glint of uncommon concentration in his eyes.

The broadcast of the news was just ending. I heard only a reference to Lord Penryn and a canceled holiday in the South of France before Pons turned the wireless off, slipped from his Inverness and his coat, and got into his smoking-jacket. He came over and sat down beside the table, where he had left his notes when he went out that afternoon.

"Ah, you look fresh and scrubbed, Parker. You did not hear the broadcast, then?"

"No."

"Lord Penryn's holiday in the South of France has been canceled."

"That is probably not the first time such a thing has happened."

"Very likely not. Yet, it is interesting to reflect that only three days ago, when Lord Penryn's holiday was first announced, it was given out that this was his first holiday in two years. Now suddenly we find it canceled. It does not seem strange to you that it is so?"

"Not at all."

"Let me put it another way: it does not seem strange to you that the holiday of the Secretary for European Affairs should be canceled at a time when there are going forward negotiations of great importance between the governments of England and France? A holiday, moreover, in a country which is a party to these negotiations—the party of the second part."

"Apart from involving it a little, it does not seem to change the aspect of the matter."

"Ah, Parker—and after ten years here—more than ten years!" He shook his head with a faint smile.

I was nettled. "Suppose you interpret it for me!"

"I submit that Lord Penryn's trip to France was not to be a holiday at all, but a journey-of-state; I submit, moreover, that the

negotiations currently going on between emissaries of the two governments have struck some kind of snag which makes the proposed journey by the Secretary for European Affairs unnecessary or futile."

"My dear Pons!"

"No, it is nothing so simple as a mere guess, believe me, Parker. It is widely enough known that the Secretary for European Affairs goes to Scotland for the shooting every year, that his sole holiday outside of England took place seven years ago when he had a fortnight in the Alps. This fanfare about his holiday in France has more behind it than it would appear."

"Well, I shall have to take your word for it unless the Foreign Office might perhaps be good enough to settle the matter, which is hardly likely."

"We shall see," retorted Pons, and bent to his notes.

It was then nine in the evening. Within half an hour the matter of Lord Penryn's lost holiday was destined to be brought once more to our attention by one of the most august personages ever to enter our modest lodgings. He did not ring the bell; he entered the building, mounted the stairs directly to our quarters, as if he were personally familiar with our habits, and knocked on the door, a subdued, but nevertheless staccato knock without a note of hesitation in it.

Pons had heard the outer door open, and had listened to the steps on the stairs. "A portly gentleman, carrying a cane, on a mission of secrecy," he observed tranquilly. "Do open the door to him, Parker."

I rose and opened the door to admit our visitor.

Pons came to his feet behind me. "The Right Honourable Sackville Somerset!" he exclaimed. "You have come about Lord Penryn."

The Prime Minister started. "You know?"

"Pray do not be alarmed. I am merely making an exercise in deduction. Will you be seated, sir?"

"Mr. Pons, we have little time to waste. If you are free to come with me, my car is outside, I can explain the matter on the way to Park Lane."

The Prime Minister was agitated; his heavy, jowled face twitched now and then, his lips were pressed together in an expression of the utmost grimness; his eyes were haunted, and a faint dew of perspiration was evident on his brow. Yet his natural austerity was not

diminished by the grave concern which troubled him. He paced back and forth, careful to be well away from the windows, while Pons and I made ready to accompany him, and, when we set forth, it was he who led the way in that same silent manner in which he had come, as if he were trying unconsciously to avoid surveillance.

His car, a long Daimler saloon, stood at the kerb. He himself opened the door for Pons and me, nodded to his chauffeur, and followed us into the dark interior.

"Now then," he said nervously, making certain that all communication with the chauffeur was shut away by the glass closing off the tonneau, "it is a most painful and grave matter, Mr. Pons - a matter, I may say, which may well bring about a rupture of relations with one of the Continental countries - if, indeed, not war!" He lifted his hat and touched his brow with his handkerchief. "A certain document intended for a trio of the highest officials of France has been stolen from the study of the Secretary for European Affairs."

"You have notified the police?"

"By no means! The matter is of such delicacy that we cannot risk any publicity, and it is not possible to close off beyond question the ranks of the police; some word of the matter could all too easily leak out, and it might be disastrous, Mr. Pons - a national calamity costing not only untold thousands perhaps millions of pounds, but also many lives. No, after consultation with those officers of our government who knew of the existence of this document, it was decided to employ your well-known talents in an effort to recover it with as much dispatch as possible. Once it is delivered into the hands of a certain foreign government - God help us in our present state of military unpreparedness!"

"Let us be frank, Mr. Somerset. The power to which you refer is Germany?"

"Let us imagine that I have admitted nothing. It is Germany."

"Very well. You speak of military preparedness - so, presumably, the document in question had to do with joint plans of England and France to arm secretly in order to be prepared for the culmination of that secret re-armament of Germany which is going on under camouflage with the tacit approval of certain American and British industrialists with rich holdings in that country."

The Prime Minister caught his breath. Then, in a spate of words he said, "Mr. Pons, you are more informed than I dared hope you might be. You have hit upon it; the document in question contains

to the last detail plans which have been worked out here by a commission of French and English experts for the secret re-armament of our two allied nations. It is well known, there is no need denying it, that Germany rankles under the terms of the Versailles Treaty, and the wounds of that country have been little salved by the Hoover Moratorium or the Dawes Plan which have come out of America. She has begun to re-arm; we are not blind to the fact. However, our people are not prepared to see us enforce the terms of the Treaty by force of arms; they have fallen victim to our own lassitude and to pacifist propaganda, which, however noble in intention, fails always to take into consideration the unknown human element in our sister nations. Moreover, there is no certainty whatsoever that France would support our force of arms, and our own Government is unfortunately sadly divided. In fact, Mr. Pons, I will not be telling you anything you could not learn from another source, but there are in our country an influential group of diplomats and industrialists who would collaborate with Germany at any price, and they have gone so far as to instil grave doubts about His Majesty's Government's official line in the mind of no less a person than the Crown Prince!"

"And the re-armament plan?"

"Ah, yes, the Strong-Cressington Plans. Lord Penryn was to present these plans to the French government tomorrow; that was the purpose of his holiday, as by this time surely you will have guessed. He carried them home with him this afternoon, as arranged, since he had planned to take the night train for Dover just before midnight. He did not leave the papers out of his sight save for a brief period of less than ten minutes, and then they were in his study. He had taken them out to go over them in an effort to settle his doubts about certain clauses; he had laid them on the table in his study; he had gone upstairs for a stronger pair of glasses; when he came back, the papers were gone. The house, moreover was locked, but he discovered on his return that a French window of the study stood slightly open; it had been broken; apparently the thief had made his entry there, and escaped with the papers in that interval."

"Presupposing that Lord Penryn had been watched, and that therefore it was known that such papers were or might be in his possession."

"Exactly, Mr. Pons." The Prime Minister sighed "Of course, it is impossible to prevent foreign agents in espionage from coming to

the correct conclusions when four of the leading exponents of re-armament in France arrive in this country and immediately vanish from public sight together with members of our own re-armament commission and certain ministers of His Majesty's Government. But here we are, and you may talk to Lord Penryn yourself. I assure you he has not left his house; no one has either left or entered the house since he telephoned me; we have issued orders to have the house watched."

"And this took place at what hour?"

"Just an hour ago, Mr. Pons - at eight-thirty o'clock. Lord Penryn was at first badly shaken, and he made the mistake of informing the British Broadcasting Corporation that his visit to the Continent had been canceled, but when he regained his composure, he recognized that absolute secrecy must be maintained in regard to every phase of his activities."

Lord Penryn's house rose in a spacious square of ground behind a hawthorn hedge, shrouded in trees, and, while not easily accessible from the street, clearly afforded refuge to anyone who succeeded in penetrating the hedge. The Prime Minister slipped from the car; Pons and I followed. Mr. Somerset led the way into the house, and went directly to the study, where we encountered Lord Penryn, the austere, bemonocled Secretary for European Affairs, pacing the floor.

Lord Penryn, a man fully six feet tall, with long, almost haughtily equine features, was haggard and distraught; his monocle swung on its ribbon against his waistcoat; his smoking-jacket hung open. His keen eyes turned on us as we crossed the threshold; he ceased his pacing and sighed with some relief.

"Somerset! And these gentlemen . . . ?" Then he recognized Pons. "Mr. Solar Pons! My dear fellow, forgive me! I am naturally upset. The Prime Minister has told you?" He looked questioningly at Somerset.

"I should like to hear your story, if you please, Lord Penryn."

"Certainly, certainly. Please be seated, gentlemen. I trust you will not mind if I remain standing. I am restless and disturbed. I brought the plans home with me, and shortly after dinner I retired to this room to look them over. I sat down at the table there - yes, Mr. Pons, the one at which the Prime Minister is sitting - at that precise spot. . . ."

"If the Prime Minister will be so kind as to take another seat," suggested Pons, "I should like the scene of the crime to be as little changed as possible."

With admirable aplomb the Prime Minister changed seats.

"Pray forgive my interruption. Continue, my lord," said Pons, as if he had not just witnessed the silent obedience of the Prime Minister of England to his whim.

"In the course of my examination, my eyes began to ache, and I left the study to go to my room for my reading-glasses. I was gone less than ten minutes, possibly closer to five; I could not immediately find my glasses, but I assure you I could not have been gone more than seven minutes. When I returned, I was dismayed to discover that the plans were gone. When I looked around, I saw that that French window stood open, just as you see it, and that a portion of one pane had been broken in. Since then, I have not set foot out of this room."

"You did not consider it indiscreet to leave the plans unguarded, my lord?" asked Pons.

"I had personally seen to it that every door and window in the house was locked."

"You are alone here?"

"No, Mr. Pons, I am not. The room above is occupied by Lady Sybil Wector, my niece, who has been acting as my hostess in the absence of my wife, now visiting relatives in America. She has been preoccupied with preparations for her marriage to Eric Horrell, Viscount Pellman, and has been indisposed most of the day, though she took dinner with me this evening. Apart from her, there is my brother Cadogan. Both are upstairs. Then there are the servants, of course. But surely you do not suspect anyone in the house, Mr. Pons; I assure you my servants have been with me for ten years and more; they are absolutely above suspicion."

"Those people who are above suspicion are rarely found, my lord. Let us now consider the possibility of how knowledge of these papers escaped, for obviously it must be so if someone broke into your study and abstracted them. How many people knew of your having the papers here tonight?"

"Apart from my personal staff and the Prime Minister, no one."

"And in Mr. Somerset's office?" inquired Pons, turning to him.

"Myself, my chief clerks, and my secretary. All are unimpeachable, Mr. Pons."

"Manifestly, however, someone let the news slip. How else could anyone have known sufficiently in advance to be watching and waiting for the opportunity to snatch the Strong-Cressington Plans? You are assuming that someone stood on the terrace outside and watched Lord Penryn at his papers; the fortuitous moment arrived,

he broke in, he snatched the papers and vanished. That presupposes informed knowledge. What manner of papers were they, by the way?"

"Like these." Lord Penryn took up three loose sheets of legal foolscap and handed them to Pons, who examined them gravely.

"These, too, seem to be plans."

"Of no account. They are public knowledge."

Pons put them absently into his pocket and got up to walk around the table, at which Lord Penryn had been sitting. Then he walked over to the partly open French window. I walked after him and stood looking over his shoulder to where he knelt examining the fragments of glass on the stone sill beyond the door. He touched nothing, however, until he came to examine the pane itself; then he detached from one edge of the broken glass a thin strand of some white material, which he handed to me with a quixotic smile.

"What do you make of this, Parker?"

"It is evidently silk. If I were to make a guess, I should say it was torn from a gentleman's silk scarf."

"It appears to be somewhat soft and light in texture for that purpose. But let us see."

He returned to the table and bent above it. Lord Penryn and the Prime Minister watched him with nervous interest, growing steadily more impatient at the thought that even now the precious plans might be on the way to alien hands. The table was plainly that of an orderly and precise man, for everything was in its place; on one side stood inkwells and pens, together with an antique box of yew containing various clips, pencils, rubbers, and similar appurtenances. Beside this lay a letter-opener, and a pen which Lord Penryn had obviously been using earlier in the evening, for one of the inkwells still stood open. On the other side of the table, that closest to the open French window, lay a bundle of papers neatly piled together and held down by a heavy glass ball on a flat base; this had at one time sustained several chips, and as my eye fell upon it, I observed that Pons was examining it with interest.

"Ah, you have seen it, Parker? What do you make of it?"

Adhering to one of the chipped places on the paperweight were two more silk fibres, of a piece with that found on the broken pane.

"Clearly the fellow leaned over here—he would be coming from the windows—he caught his scarf again here, and left his calling card, so to speak," I ventured.

"That is a most ingenious solution. And how would you account for the strand we discovered on the window-pane?"

The explanation struck me even as Pons asked. "Obviously the scarf was used to muffle the sound of the glass being broken."

Pons looked across to the Secretary for European Affairs. "Did you hear the sound of breaking glass at any time?"

"No, Mr. Pons. I heard nothing."

"Where is your room, my lord?"

"At the far end of the upper hall."

"So that it would not be at all strange if you failed to hear such a sound?"

"No, it would not."

"I daresay we have arrived at the correct explanation in regard to the glass. Where are the servants?"

"In their quarters."

"Their quarters are at the rear of the house?"

"Yes."

"They were there at the time of the burglary?"

"Yes."

"I think I should like to question Lady Wector and your brother Cadogan. Do you think you might summon them to the study?"

"Certainly, Mr. Pons, if you wish it."

"I do. Meanwhile, I shall just look about the rest of the house a bit. No, thank you, I will go alone. I trust you will have Lady Wector and your brother here at my return."

"I will get them myself."

The Prime Minister's agitation broke forth. "Mr. Pons, I beg of you! Think - the papers may even now be escaping us! Are these questions necessary?"

"That is impossible to say at this point. They may yield nothing. Nevertheless, I am bound to ask them. Pray trust to my methods, Mr. Somerset."

Thus admonished, the Prime Minister settled back once more, though with obvious reluctance, while Pons slipped from the room, and Lord Penryn followed, on his way to summon his brother and his niece.

When Pons returned almost a quarter of an hour later, Lady Sybil Wector and her uncle Cadogan were waiting in the study. Lady Sybil was a dark-eyed, dark haired young woman in her late

twenties; she was most attractive, but manifestly at the moment uncertain of her role, as was her uncle, also. He was a man somewhat younger than his famous brother, and of a different stamp, rather careless of his appearance, with far less dignity than his brother naturally possessed. He regarded Pons, at his entrance, with openly shown suspicion, put out the cigarette he had been smoking, and tightened himself up, narrowing his eyes. Solar Pons made an impressive figure standing before them; he had not removed his Inverness, and the flowing folds of his cape seemed to give added emphasis to his lean, hawk-like face.

"Ah, Lady Sybil Wector—I am sorry to inconvenience you," began Pons without the formality of an introduction, "but an attempt has been made to break into his lordship's study,"—he gestured casually toward the French windows—"and we are most anxious to ascertain whether or not you heard the sound of breaking glass."

"I was lying down."

"You heard nothing?"

"Nothing but my uncle ascending the stairs, Mr. Pons."

"I see. And you, sir?" He turned to Lord Penryn's brother.

"I heard nothing."

Pons looked at him searchingly. "You have been playing billiards within the past twelve hours?"

The fellow started, and then smiled. "I've heard of your methods, Mr. Solar Pons. I have."

"Yes, there is chalk on your clothes. Did I not see you at the races yesterday week?"

"Quite possible."

Lord Penryn interrupted angrily. "I told you to keep away, Cadogan."

"Yes, I believe you did, my lord," said Cadogan with ill-concealed disrespect.

"You were in your room all the evening?" pressed Pons.

"Yes, I was."

"And you, Lady Sybil?"

"Certainly, Mr. Pons. I was lying down, as I said. I retired to my room directly after dinner."

The Prime Minister covered his eyes with one hand and sighed. Lord Penryn fidgeted with his monocle. Both gentlemen were manifestly burning with impatience to be up and about doing something more active to recover the stolen papers.

Pons excused Lady Sybil Wector, and stood facing Cadogan.

"I fancy it is not a shot in the dark to suggest to you, sir, that you have been gambling."

"Not at all. My brother could have told you."

"He did not."

"How deeply are you in?"

Cadogan got up leisurely and insolently. "I do not believe I am required to answer that question. Good-night, Mr. Pons."

"Good-night. Try the third horse in the second tomorrow."

Cadogan turned on the threshold and gave Pons a rather amazed grin; then he was gone.

"I must apologize for my brother's rudeness," said Lord Penryn in some concern.

"Ah, not at all, my lord. He was within his rights. I take it his gambling scrapes are a source of some difficulty."

"He has no respect for my position," said Lord Penryn with manifest pain. "He does not seem to realize that there are people who are only too ready to discredit me for what my brother is and does."

"But the papers, Mr. Pons!" cried the Prime Minister in a despairing voice.

"If you gentlemen will put yourself in my hands, I fancy I shall be able to produce them before the night is over."

Both the Prime Minister and the Secretary for European Affairs gazed at Pons in astonishment. It was Lord Penryn who broke the awkward silence.

"Forgive me. You startled me. Whatever you say, Mr. Pons."

"Very well then. There is not much time. Do you possess fire arms, my lord?"

"I have a brace of revolvers."

"We shall want them. We shall want the Prime Minister's car."

"It is at your disposal," said Mr. Somerset.

Lord Penryn left the room.

"You may call off anyone guarding the house. Now."

The Prime Minister looked uncertainly at Pons, but, after only a moment of reluctance, he went to the telephone, called a number, and gave the necessary directives. Then he returned to face Pons.

"If there is danger, Mr. Pons, perhaps we had better notify the police?"

"No, I believe that unnecessary."

Lord Penryn came back into the room, carrying his revolvers

"They are loaded?"

"Ready for use, Mr. Pons."

"Good. We are going out. I fancy the four of us can deal with the matter. Has your lordship canceled his bookings on the Dover train?"

"No, Mr. Pons, I forgot to do so."

"Capital! You may yet have use for them. Let us have faith. Now then, if Mr. Somerset will be so good as to instruct his chauffeur to follow my directions without deviation. . . ."

"Certainly, Mr. Pons. We have come this far; we must go all the way."

"I fancy that is politically sound," said Pons dryly.

We left the house and got into the Prime Minister's car. Pons followed us into the tonneau after he had given instructions to the chauffeur. After the door closed behind him, the car pulled smoothly away.

"If I may ask — where are we going?" inquired Lord Penryn.

"My lord, we are going only a very short distance. You shall see."

The car rolled up to a corner, into Oxford Street, down Bond Street, along Piccadilly, and continued until we were once more back in Park Lane; the headlights went out, the car glided smoothly to a stop. Lord Penryn looked out.

"Why, sir, we are only a few doors removed from my home!"

"Six doors, I believe."

"What are we doing here?"

"Waiting."

"Great Heaven! Upon what or whom are we waiting now?" burst out the Prime Minister.

"Why, we are waiting for a car which will drive out into Park Lane from one of these houses within the next half hour, unless I am sadly mistaken. When it does, we are going to follow it."

Lord Penryn and the Prime Minister exchanged shaken glances. I was myself beginning to feel a little shaken, confident as I was of Pons's methods. I took out a cigarette and would have lit it, but Pons stopped me.

"No smoking, Parker. Someone may see the glow of your cigarette."

The minutes ticked slowly past. Outside the clear sky vanished as a light mist began to form along the street. The Prime Minister and the Secretary for European Affairs could not conceal their

uneasiness. Big Ben boomed out the hour of ten; it seemed incredible that everything, which had so far taken place since the Prime Minister called at our lodgings, had occurred within forty minutes.

We had not as long to wait, however, as Pons had supposed. Within a quarter of an hour of the time we had rolled to a stop along the kerb, a car swung out into Park Lane some distance ahead of us; Pons rapped smartly on the glass, and our car started up, almost noiselessly, and went for several minutes without turning on the headlights, for there was little traffic at this hour, and the fog was not yet thick. Then the dimmed lights were put cautiously on; our quarry was within easy sight ahead of us. Indeed, we had gone less than two miles before we came to a stop once more. Before us by seven or eight doors, stood the object of our pursuit.

"Here we go, Parker," said Pons. He pressed one of Lord Penryn's revolvers upon him. "My lord, you will be driven up closer to the other car, which is standing just before the house we want. Parker and I are going around to the back; you gentlemen will oblige me by keeping the front of the house under reasonable surveillance. That is — if a man comes out of the front door, stop him; use the pistol if necessary. If a woman — make no effort to stop her. Stay in the car until Parker comes for you. Now, then, Parker — a clever game is afoot."

We slipped out of the car and ran along a row of houses there before we darted down a little lane, made our way somewhat incautiously through a yew-hedge, and emerged into an attractively planned garden. Pons pushed forward. By this time the fog had increased in density to such a degree that it required care to prevent one from blundering into shrubs or falling over statuary in the garden. Pons went directly up to the French windows opening from the house to the garden; behind them, a subdued light glowed, and, as I came up behind him and pressed my face, too, to the glass, I saw in that room the back of a heavily veiled woman, and across the table from her, a familiar, most sinister figure — that of the arch-criminal, Baron Ennesfred Kroll! At the moment of our coming, the woman had evidently just handed the Baron an envelope which he held in his hands, the contents of which he was just about to examine.

With adroit rapidity, Solar Pons kicked in the French windows and leveled his pistol at the man behind the table.

"Baron Kroll, I believe."

An expression of baffled rage made the Baron's sinister features livid. His eyes darted from one to the other of us, to the open doors behind us, across the room to the door into the hall, through which his visitor had come.

"I assure you, my dear fellow, I would enjoy pulling the trigger. I advise you to be more circumspect."

At this instant the woman turned silently and fled.

"Let her go, Parker."

"You are not a police-agent, Mr. Solar Pons."

"Sir, I am but a lowly house-breaker," retorted Pons. "I concede that that is considerably below the status of an extraordinary espionage agent and blackmailer, who is not above stooping to any kind of indecency to gain his ends. Parker, you may now summon the gentlemen in the car outside. Pray contain yourself, Baron — one false move, and Berlin will have the opportunity to give you a state funeral."

"You will regret this, Mr. Solar Pons."

Neither Pons nor Kroll had changed his position when I returned with Lord Penryn and the Prime Minister, both of whom preceded me into the room, so that I saw the astonishment and chagrin on their faces, for both had met Baron Kroll socially.

"I think you gentlemen know one another," said Pons suavely. "If your lordship will be so good as to take that envelope from Baron Kroll's hands — pray keep out of range, my lord."

The Secretary for European Affairs, white with anger, stepped across the room and snatched the envelope from Baron Kroll.

"Pray examine it, gentlemen. I fancy you will find in it state papers of such importance as to make it necessary to hold Baron Kroll as a foreign espionage agent."

Lord Penryn tore open the envelope with shaking fingers; he took out the folded foolscap within, unfolded it — and let out a low, inarticulate cry, while his features expressed the uttermost horror.

"Mr. Pons!" he cried in a trembling voice. "These are not the Strong-Cressington Plans!"

Pons flashed an urgent glance at the Prime Minister. "I believe Mr. Somerset will identify them as important state papers whose possession by Baron Kroll subjects him to appropriate prosecution under the Military Secrets Act."

The Prime Minister took the papers from Lord Penryn's trembling fingers, glanced at them, nodded, and stepped to Baron Kroll's telephone to call in members of the C.I.D. and order Baron

Kroll under arrest. But, clearly, something had gone wrong, though Pons continued to talk and act as if Lord Penryn had made the error and not he, much to my perplexity. Was he then so determined to win the battle of wits with the Baron that he would willingly prosecute him for a theft of which he had not been guilty? But if Baron Kroll had not held in his hands the Strong-Cressington Plans, what papers had he held? He had not had time himself to examine them, for the envelope had not yet been fully opened when it had been passed into Lord Penryn's possession.

"I have met this man in my own house," said Lord Penryn at last in a voice heavy with accusation.

"Baron Kroll does not uphold the same standards as English gentlemen do," said Pons. "He carries on a secondary existence as a particularly obnoxious kind of leech who preys upon human failings by blackmailing his poor victims - not for money, for he has no need of that; I fancy Berlin makes him a generous allowance - but for anything in the way of state secrets which may be of value to his superiors. We shall discover his dupes in good time."

Baron Kroll bared his teeth in a kind of feral grimace. "I demand the right to communicate with my legal advisers."

"No, Baron, I think not," said Pons.

"At least let me be assured that my possessions will not be molested."

"Sir, I am no common house-breaker," answered Pons. "I assure you that *your* possessions will be left strictly alone."

Baron Kroll fenced with his eyes; a fine beading of perspiration became evident on his forehead. But he said nothing more until a Commissioner of New Scotland Yard and two Inspectors, one of them our old friend, Jamison, came to take Baron Kroll away.

They had hardly departed before both Lord Penryn and the Prime Minister crowded upon my friend.

"The Strong-Cressington Plans!" exclaimed the Secretary for European Affairs. "Where are they?"

"Pray be patient, gentlemen," replied Pons, gravely looking at his watch. "It is not yet eleven. There is plenty of time to catch the Dover train." He turned to me. "Now then, Parker, we have work to do. We shall look for letters, photographs, and the usual debris of blackmail."

Forthwith we began to turn the study upside down, but it was Pons who found, behind a large portrait on the wall, the receptacle which contained the things he sought. He took out packet after

packet of letters, stuffing them into his pockets, occasionally calling out a name, until at last he had an answer.

"David Regan!" cried the Prime Minister. "He is my secretary."

"Then it was he who informed Baron Kroll that Lord Penryn had taken the Strong-Cressington Plans home with him!"

"Impossible!"

"Not at all. Here are his letters. I fancy the Baron paid handsomely for them, that he felt his indiscretions of more importance than state secrets. He telephoned the Baron, and the Baron telephoned another of his victims whose circumstances were even more pressing. She brought him the papers."

"But no!" cried Lord Penryn, agonized now. "Mr. Pons, you are playing with us."

"Not at all, my lord. Come, we are finished here. We shall return to our lodgings if the Prime Minister will be so kind."

We drove rapidly to Number Seven, Praed Street, Pons discoursing all the way in the most agonizingly leisurely fashion on the foibles of men and women, and the ways of blackmailers, who invade the defenceless and put spiritual pressure upon even the strongest men and women with disastrous results.

"Come in, gentlemen," invited Pons as the car drew up before Number Seven.

The Prime Minister and the Secretary for European Affairs had no recourse but to follow Pons. Once more inside our rooms, of which we had taken our leave less than two hours before, Pons divested himself of his Inverness and stood next to the fire, rubbing his hands and gazing at the clock.

"There is still time to get the Dover train, my lord." He smiled and turned to the Prime Minister. "Mr. Somerset, be advised to do all in your power to see to it that Baron Kroll cannot operate any longer in England. I know that powerful pressure will be brought to bear, both by his government, and by his friends within our borders. Regan must be dismissed; but do not be too harsh with him; God knows what torture was applied by that scoundrel." He turned to Lord Penryn. "My Lord, do you know who stole the Strong-Cressington Plans?"

"Mr. Pons, I do not. I cannot think."

"It is of little moment, in the circumstances. You will come to it in good time; pray do not forget to be merciful. Here are the papers."

So saying, Pons reached into the inner pocket of his coat and gave the Strong-Cressington Plans into Lord Penryn's hands. Lord Penryn allowed them to fall open so that he could identify them.

"Thank God!" he cried.

The Prime Minister looked at Pons with a dark frown. "By what legerdemain did you accomplish that, Mr. Pons?"

"Remarkable! Astounding!" cried Lord Penryn.

"You overestimate my modest powers, gentlemen. The Strong-Cressington Plans were not for one moment out of Lord Penryn's house until I carried them out myself."

"You!" exclaimed the Secretary for European Affairs.

"Ah, yes, My Lord. Surely it was obvious that no one had entered by the window? Even my friend Parker came close to seeing that. You will reflect that the broken glass from the pane of the French window lay on the stone sill, which is on the outside, not on the floor inside, thus indicating that the glass had been broken from the inside. Moreover, the strand of silk I picked from the jagged pane was taken from the inside. And, finally, the paperweight had been wrapped in the silk cloth for the purpose of breaking the window, thus accounting for the silk fibres adhering to it. Observing this, having the assurance of the Prime Minister that no one had entered or left the house since Lord Penryn's discovery of his loss, I had no alternative but to realize that the papers had not been delivered; therefore it followed that they were still in the house; and I had only to look in the most likely place, find them, and substitute the old papers which you, my lord, had so kindly shown me but a few minutes before. At once I felt that the Strong-Cressington Plans might lead me to Baron Kroll, with whom I have had several encounters, ending less happily, ere this."

"Mr. Pons, allow me to congratulate you," said the Prime Minister.

"Thank you. But now, as you see, it is past eleven. I fancy there is still time for Lord Penryn to change his mind and take his holiday in the South of France, after all. Good-night, gentlemen."

After he had shown our distinguished clients from our lodgings, Pons returned to the packets of letters he had taken from Baron Kroll's study. He sought through them until he came to a small packet on cream stationery.

"Ah, here are Lady Sybil Wector's most indiscreet letters to young Alison Scott. Dear me! I fear Viscount Pellman would never

have appreciated them; he is rather stodgy, and doubtless the Baron is well aware of it. Let us just slip them into an envelope and post them back to Lady Sybil tonight. We shall see to it that the other letters reach their rightful owners tomorrow."

"It must elate you to have cornered Baron Kroll at last, Pons."

"Ah, how sanguine you are, Parker! You know the ways of the world. I have cornered him tonight tomorrow, who knows? Diplomacy is not your field. But at least, I fancy England will be free of him for a time. There are darker days coming. I had rather he were permanently disposed of, but an alert opponent adds zest to the game, and, though he is a scoundrel, he is an opponent worthy of my mettle."

Nor was Pons wrong in his final deduction in the matter of Lord Penryn's lost holiday. Within a fortnight the Right Honourable Sackville Somerset did him the courtesy of sending word that Baron Ennesfred Kroll, claiming diplomatic immunity, had been given the support of the German Embassy and had so escaped punishment under the Military Secrets Act. The Prime Minister, however, succeeded in having Baron Kroll stigmatized as *persona non grata* to His Majesty's Government, and thus forced his recall to Berlin, just as Solar Pons had foreseen.

The Adventure of the Blind Clairaudient

"AH," MURMURED SOLAR PONS from where he stood at the window of No. 7B, looking down into Praed Street. "I fancy we are about to have the offer of a case. What a pity I shall not be able to take it!"

I interrupted our packing for a holiday on the Continent and came over to his side to follow the direction of his gaze. A cab stood at the kerb, and, getting out of it were an elderly lady and her companion, a man of thirty-odd years.

"She must be quite infirm," I ventured. "See how she depends on her companion."

Pons chuckled. "No, Parker, she is blind. Observe the way she holds her head -she doesn't look down for the kerb, and her companion walks slightly in advance of her, guiding her steps."

"You didn't mention an appointment."

"I have none, so I am free to listen to the problem the lady is bringing to me."

"Why not the young man?"

"Oh, come, Parker! Why would a blind woman put herself to such trouble if only for a companion perfectly able to tell us his own story? No, the problem is hers. . . . Ah, they have roused Mrs. Johnson."

In a few moments our estimable landlady knocked gently on our door, then opened it and stuck her honest, scrubbed face, surmounted by coils of heavy hair, into the room.

"A lady to see you, Mr. Pons."

"Send her in, by all means, Mrs. Johnson," said Pons.

Mrs. Johnson withdrew, swinging the door wide as she did so, revealing our prospective client and her companion. She did not now seem either so aged or infirm as I had taken her to be at first sight. She was a stout woman of about sixty-five. Her hair was greying, but the skin of her face was curiously little lined and had a kind of translucence, heightened by the dark glasses which concealed her eyes. Led by her companion, a young red haired man with a mottled skin and bushy brows over pale blue eyes, she stepped into the room.

"Mr. Pons," she said uncertainly "Mr. Solar Pons?"

"Pray be seated," said Pons, motioning her companion to a chair.

"I am Lily MacLain, Mr. Pons. You may have seen my advertisement in the papers."

"I've seen your announcement, Miss MacLain. 'Clairaudient Readings.' In Oakley Street, just around the corner from Cheyne Walk."

"I've been in Chelsea ever since I did a turn on the stage," said our client. "It's a good place for anyone with what they're beginning to call extra-sensory powers. This good young man is my nephew, Theodore Holt. He has served as my eyes since he came to live with me three years ago – after the most faithful of companions died."

"I daresay your problem hardly pertains to the future, if you can read it," said Pons.

"Well, Mr. Pons, I do read the future. I do, indeed." She spoke slowly, as if she were choosing her words with care. "But there are limitations under which we all fall – all of us who have the gift. And the principal one is that few of us – very few of us – are ever able to penetrate the veil when it comes to ourselves. That picture seldom comes clear – it remains murky. But for others, no. For instance, Mr. Pons, I can tell you that you will soon solve an extraordinary series of crimes in which a bird serves as an accomplice to a murderer; you will be asked to investigate another series of murders involving a suspected werewolf, you will be instrumental in exposing a rather well-known doctor who has successfully done away with one wife and is only thwarted by your good offices in doing away with his second. But if I were to step out into the street within the hour only to be run down by a taxi, I could not in all probability foresee it."

Pons's eyes twinkled; the ghost of a smile touched his lips. "But you haven't come here to expound upon my future, Miss MacLain."

"No, Mr. Pons. On mine. I want to pose an unusual problem for those talents which are especially yours. I'm not without funds. People pay well for my services. So few are content to let the veil be; they want it lifted. I am as well prepared to pay for your services as most of them are for mine. In short, Mr. Pons, I want you to avenge me."

"In what connection?"

"I want you to see to it that my murderer is punished."

Pons's eyes danced. "You anticipate being murdered?"



" 'Anticipate' is not quite the word, Mr. Pons. Let us say rather that I will be murdered. It is not my future I've read. I've heard the voices. And they speak of murder."

"Let us start at the beginning, Miss MacLain," suggested Pons.

Our client pursed her lips thoughtfully. "I suppose you might say it began when I did a reading for a man who called himself Alistair Green. I say 'called himself' because many people fail to give their real names. He had marital difficulties, and I saw no future for him with his wife. In fact, I saw danger for him if he remained with her. Evidently he went home and began an argument which resulted in her leaving him. As a consequence, he developed a strong hatred for me; like most weak men, he tried to put blame for his own shortcomings elsewhere. He came to see me again and again—usually he had been drinking—and once he created such a disturbance, in the course of which he threatened me, that Theodore had to take care of him. Isn't that true, Theodore?"

"Yes, Aunt Lily," said her companion. "Mr. Pons, he threatened to kill my aunt."

"After which, of course, Theodore threw him out."

Her nephew nodded in confirmation. "He came five times in all—so far. He'll come again."

"Perhaps it is needless to say," said our client, "that we looked up Alistair Green at the address he had given us, but his address was as false as his name."

"Did you lodge information with the police?" asked Pons.

Our client shook her head with a faint smile. "Could they do any more than we did?"

"But you could have described him, Mr. Holt," pressed Pons.

"Mr. Pons, he came by night. My aunt keeps her place dimly lit for atmospheric reasons. I saw him, yes. He was short, blond, with hair closely trimmed; he wore a moustache and he looked to be a sporty type—not the kind who usually consult my aunt."

Pons looked quizzically at Lily MacLain. "Would it not be simpler to apprehend this man for having threatened you?"

"No, Mr. Pons. The police have never been kind to those of us who have the gift. They would dismiss such a charge brought by one in my calling, since in their eyes no very great crime was committed. I would only end up by angering him so much more."

"So you feel he is earnest enough in his threats to eventually carry them through?"

"Mr. Pons, I will die."

She said this as calmly as if she had long been resigned to it.

"Why need this be so?" pressed Pons. "In the face of warnings?"

"Mr. Pons, it will happen. A knife will be used. I invite your particular attention to the weapon. This man will come to my house in the night. As a result of his coming, I will die. You ask about 'need.' I can do nothing to prevent it. I'm not asking your pity; I ask only simple justice."

I could not help interrupting, not, I fear, without a trace of scepticism in my voice. "How can you know this, Miss MacLain?"

"Dr. Parker, I can understand the profound doubt of a medical man," our client answered. "Sir, in my calling, as I have said, we are unable to read our fate. But in projecting ourselves into the future through our gift, there is a point at which we lose awareness of ourselves; after that point we cease to exist. I am not aware of myself very far in the future."

"A police-guard might be obtained for your home," I suggested.

"The police are needed on far more tangible difficulties than mine," said the clairaudent. "Mr. Pons, can I count on you?"

"At the moment, Dr. Parker and I are off to the Continent. Perhaps I can call on you on our return?"

"Thank you."

She extended one arm for her nephew and, supported by him, came to her feet. Then she bade us good-afternoon.

Once our client had gone, I could not prevent my protest from bursting forth. "I have a particular dislike for charlatanry of this kind, Pons. All this sort of clairvoyance, fortune-telling, palm-reading, and the like. It is all nonsense, designed to prey upon the hopes and fears of the ignorant."

"Who demand to be preyed upon," added Pons. "A healthy scepticism is a good attribute. I like to keep an open mind. One can never be positive in matters of this kind, however rational it seems to deny out-of-hand the manifestations of the so-called supernatural or extra-sensory."

"Pons, this woman's story was a rigmarole of the ridiculous," I cried. "Fancy retaining someone to avenge a murder not yet committed!"

"I am not nearly so positive as you, Parker. You have a happy faculty for seeing only the evidence which supports your prejudices. I can hardly afford such a luxury."

"Pons, you cannot believe this woman has foreseen her death!"

"*She* is certainly convinced that she will be murdered," replied Pons. "As to whether she has foreseen it in the reprehensible manner you infer—that is another matter. She has some reason quite beyond the clairaudience in which she professes to be adept. She has been actively threatened in the presence of at least one witness besides herself. On that score, her fears are not entirely groundless."

"A thousand persons are threatened for every one who is done to death," I said.

"Perfectly true, my dear fellow. It did not strike you, then, that there was something cogently convincing about Miss MacLain's appeal?"

"Not in the slightest."

"Did it occur to you that she may have had some ulterior motive in coming to me?"

"Perhaps."

"What, then, could it be?"

I shrugged. "You are the expert on ratiocination, Pons. Not I."

"Which makes it all the more a puzzle that you, who are not, should think her guilty of some ulterior motive. It suggests nothing to you that she avoids the police?"

"She explained that herself. The police, like myself—very wisely, too, if I may say so—have a natural distrust of charlatans."

"Let me put it this way—it does not seem to you that she may distrust the police as much as they may distrust her and that therefore she has come to me convinced that if she is killed the police are entirely likely to bungle the solution of her murder?"

I laughed. "Forgive my amusement," I said.

"My dear Parker, it reassures me." He smiled himself. "Nevertheless, there are certain aspects of this little problem which delight and challenge me. I believe it is the first time in all my years of making private inquiries that the victim of a murder. . . ."

"A projected murder," I put in.

"Very well, a projected murder," agreed Pons imperturbably. "It is the first time that the victim has retained me to solve her murder before it has taken place."

"Pons, do you honestly expect her to be murdered?"

"I should not be inordinately surprised if her death by violence came about."

"As she has predicted?"

"Let us say, more or less as she has predicted."

"Pons, this is fantastic!" I cried. "That you, of all people, who rationalize everything, should be taken in by a type of predatory charlatan who is quite common the length and breadth of England!"

"Our client has been faced with certain premises and has drawn certain conclusions from them. Her clairaudience has played only a minor part in the matter. She has now laid before us these same premises, and it is plain to see that each of us has drawn diametrically different conclusions from them. But let us examine this little matter of clairaudience. What do you conceive it to be, Parker?"

"Simply stated, it is said to be the ability to hear sounds which are ordinarily beyond hearing. It is the aural equivalent of clairvoyance, which is presumed to be the ability to see events beyond the perception of others."

"By that definition a man whose ears are attuned to certain high-pitched sounds—like cries of birds and frogs—not commonly heard by other men, would be clairaudient?"

"Well, not exactly."

"Or a dog, that hears whistles which make no sound to our ears when we blow them, is then a clairaudient?"

I protested in exasperation. "No, no, it isn't like that at all. It's hearing something which could not possibly be heard! Like voices from next week or a conversation in another city, like those conversations from the future of which Miss MacLain spoke but a short time ago. You know very well what clairaudience is."

"Indeed, I do. But do you? I submit that it is perfectly possible for one person to be far more developed in one sense than most of the people who surround him. And this is particularly true of those who have to rely on the senses that remain to them after the loss of one—especially one so important as sight."

"I don't deny it. But I draw the line at someone who pretends to hear voices from the future. Lily MacLain professes to do so. She has said as much in so many words in our presence. You've heard her—so have I. This is charlatanry."

"Why? Because you do not have this gift?"

"Not at all. Because it refutes science!"

"Strong words, Parker! Strong words! Let us just say it goes against what we know of science at this point in the development of man."

"That's strong enough for me."

"And if science next week or next year or a half century hence uncovers a perfectly logical explanation for clairaudience in its currently most reprehensible form—I use the terminology your attitude suggests—then you, too, will subscribe to it?"

"Certainly."

Pons chuckled. "I must admit your attitude is scarcely different from that of those of our ancestors who proclaimed, 'This golden calf is All!' or 'This stone image is All!' or 'God is All!' In your case it is Science that is to be worshiped. Scientist though I take pride in being, I would be the last to suggest that our scientific discoveries to date have reached such a stage of perfection that we have achieved ultimate knowledge and no further advances are open to us."

"I've said no such thing!" I protested vehemently.

"You inferred it. But our problem here does not depend solely upon the issue of clairaudience," he went on. "We have a tangible potential murderer in the fellow who calls himself 'Alistair Green,' and we have certain keys to his identity, despite Miss MacLain's pessimism. His wife has recently left him, and we know that he is a man who is slight of stature, light of weight, and much given to anger and bluster."

"How do you arrive at stature and weight, if I may ask?"

"You had a good look at our client's companion. Would you say he could be described as husky?"

"Hardly."

"Yet he 'threw Green' out of the house in Oakley Street. 'Green' must therefore be of even less weight and slighter of stature than Mr. Holt."

"Of course! I should have seen something so elementary."

"The most astonishing feats of ratiocination in the history of mankind seem elementary upon elucidation of the steps between premise and conclusion," observed Pons.

"But all that is hardly enough to put you on Green's trail."

"True. But did it not strike you that our client was not anxious that we *should* be set upon his trail?"

"Now that you mention it, she didn't seem particularly enthusiastic."

"So that, in effect, our client may have what the psychoanalytical gentlemen in your department would call 'the death wish.' If she does not actively wish to die, she is resigned to the idea of death. Her wish is not for me to prevent the event she

foresees take note—but to avenge it. Does this not strike you as singular?"

"Far-fetched, but not singular."

"Indeed! I submit it is one of the most provocative little puzzles I have ever had put before me. Time will tell us its meaning. I confess to some concern for Miss MacLain. Perhaps we could shorten our holiday by a week."

As we were stepping out of our cab in the early morning hours of a day just a week later, our landlady, who had been expecting us and had evidently been waiting upon our arrival, came hurrying down the steps of 7B, and called out, "You'll want that cab, Mr. Pons."

"Indeed!" said Pons.

"Inspector Jamison has left a message asking you to call at Miss MacLain's house in Oakley Street," explained Mrs. Johnson.

Pons flashed me a cryptic glance. "We are too late," he said. "Take our bags into the hall, Parker, and we'll be off."

Inspector Jamison waited for us in the house in Oakley Street, enthroned in self-importance in the ornate parlour, which was furnished in quasi-Victorian fashion. Theodore Holt, manifestly dejected, sat silent nearby in the room to which the constable at the door admitted us.

"Well, Mr. Pons," said Jamison, "your late client has been murdered in the manner she told you she would be. We have the murderer, but in view of her application to you, Mr. Holt here insisted that we should send for you."

Pons turned to our late client's nephew. "Perhaps we may hear from Mr. Holt just what took place."

Holt looked up haggardly. "Certainly, Mr. Pons. I was awakened at just about midnight by an unusual sound. It was probably the breaking in of the window in my aunt's bedroom, but for a while then as I lay awake I heard nothing. Then my aunt stirred in her bed. I heard her call out, 'Is that you, Ted?' So I slipped out of bed at once, knowing she'd heard something I hadn't. I was on the stairs when I heard a kind of muffled blow. Aunt Lily groaned. I ran into her room to find this fellow bending over her bed. I had armed myself with a poker. I struck him—hard."

"Green?"

"Yes, Mr. Pons. That's what he called himself."

"Oh, he struck him, all right, Mr. Pons," said Jamison appreciatively. "He was still out when we got here. We've only just sent him away."

"I'm sorry to say I was too late to save my poor aunt," concluded Holt. "Her visit to you was prophetic, Mr. Pons—more prophetic than I dreamed."

Pons listened attentively to this recital, and for a few moments stood in that attitude of deep thought so characteristic of him—head sunk on chest, eyes closed, the fingers of his right hand stroking his earlobe. Then he stirred, his eyes opened, he looked at Jamison.

"Let us just have a look at the bedroom."

"Look all you like, Pons. It can't do any harm."

Holt came to his feet. "This way, Mr. Pons."

The adjoining bedroom was in disarray. The bed particularly was much disturbed. The body of Lily MacLain had been removed, but bloodstains were mute testimony to the crime which had taken place there only a few hours before. A window across the room from the bed in which the blind woman had lain had been opened by means of a broken pane so that a hand could reach through and get at the lock; glass still lay on the sill and the carpet. It was the sound of this breakage which had undoubtedly awakened both Lily MacLain and her nephew.

"Where did you find her murderer?" Pons asked Jamison.

"Right there beside the bed, Pons. Just where he fell when Mr. Holt struck him."

"Who is the fellow?"

"His name's Jasper Howells. Employed by Instow & Son as a bookkeeper. Wife recently left him. He's been around here several times. Had too much to drink each time. He admits that."

"Ah, you've had a statement from him?"

"Oh, yes. He came around before we took him in."

"He denied he had killed Miss MacLain, of course."

"Not in so many words, though most of them do. Said he couldn't remember all he'd done. He said he had called on his victim at half-past nine—not half-past eleven, the time he killed her. You could still smell drink on him, and he talked like it, though it was a pretty sharp blow Mr. Holt gave him. He's got a skull fracture. If he hadn't been so hardheaded, he'd have been killed. He claims he fell into a stupor here and can't remember

what happened. A very common defence, if I may say so—he'll probably use that for his defence at the trial. But Mr. Holt tells me Miss MacLain told you about his threatening her, Pons."

"True. If this is the same man who gave her the name 'Alistair Green.' "

"It is, Mr. Pons," put in Holt.

Pons turned to him. "Tell me, Mr. Holt, is there anyone else who might have had enough animosity against your aunt to wish her dead?"

"I cannot say, sir, but I doubt it very much," Holt said somewhat reluctantly.

"I observe that you hesitate, Mr. Holt. Who is it?"

Holt attempted a weak smile. "There was a middle-aged man who had paid some attention to Aunt Lily. I believe he'd proposed to her. She spurned him. It upset him badly, and he talked a little wildly. But I'm sure he entertained no real animosity."

"When was this?"

"Oh, six weeks ago. He used to come here for readings at first. He'd been coming for more than seven years, Aunt Lily told me. She foretold his wife's death three years ago, and other things."

Pons crossed to the window and looked out.

"Of course," continued Holt, "there were people who were dissatisfied with Aunt Lily's readings. There are always those. They go away disgruntled, sometimes angry, and sometimes they come back to tell her so. I could set down a list, if you like. But once they've got it off their minds, so to speak, they've done it and they forget all about it."

"A low window," murmured Pons. "The room is easy of access. The paving below would effectively eliminate footprints."

Jamison smiled indulgently. "We've been all about the place, Pons. Fine tooth comb, you might say. Now, in regard to what Miss MacLain told you a week ago—you'll be available for the preliminary proceedings, Pons?"

"Certainly, if the prosecution is generous enough to accept the testimony of amateurs."

"Oh, you amateurs sometimes do us a little service or two, Pons," said Jamison with unwonted generosity.

"Your flattery touches me, Inspector," said Pons, and turned again to Holt. "What is the name of that middle-aged fellow who was attentive to your aunt?"

"Gerald King, sir."

"Where can he be found?"

"He lives nearby. In Flood Street. Number 71."

"We've already questioned him, Pons," said Jamison. "He denies his attentions were rejected by Miss MacLain. Just the opposite. It would trouble his vanity to admit being turned down, wouldn't it? Some of these middle-aged fellows are touchy."

"Quite, quite," murmured Pons. "Now, if you don't mind, I'll just have a look around. The kitchen, I take it, lies at the back of the house?"

"This way, Mr. Pons," said Holt, starting from the room.

In the kitchen Jamison pointed to a carving-knife on the table. "It was that kind of knife with which he killed her, Pons. Set of two."

"He used Miss MacLain's knife?"

"Oh, it was no risk coming out here to get it. She was blind, you'll remember."

"True, true. You have the weapon, of course?"

"Certainly, Pons."

"You've examined it for fingerprints?"

"That's being done. But I can tell you Howells's prints are on it as clear as they need be – to the naked eye – written in her blood."

Pons stood again in deep thought, his eyes partly closed. His fine nostrils trembled, and the entire expression on his feral face was that of a keen-scented animal hard on the track of prey. When he opened his eyes again, he gave the kitchen only a cursory glance. He gazed at Jamison.

"Your men will be putting Howells through the mincer," he said. "Let me suggest you lose no time advising them to pay close attention to his fingertips – all sides."

Jamison favoured him with a blank stare. "Oh, come, Pons," he said at last, "we've got him. Very full prints."

"I suggest you lose no time, Jamison," said Pons icily. "Evidence may be destroyed. At any time they may permit Howells to wash his hands. Get on the telephone and have a report sent back here without delay. Dust his nails, Jamison – his nails."

"The telephone's in here, Inspector," said Holt.

When Inspector Jamison returned, Pons asked, "What of the weapon? It was not found in the victim's body, I take it?"

"No. It was on the floor, next to Howells. By the look of it, he'd

struck her once; not knowing whether it was fatal, he was about to strike her again, when Holt's blow dropped him. He let go of the knife."

"I assumed as much," said Pons.

"If I could have been only a few moments sooner," lamented Holt miserably.

"Never mind, sir," said Jamison. "You couldn't know."

"But she had been threatened! I should have been down without delay. He wouldn't have had time to find the knife then."

Pons now busied himself with a close examination of the kitchen, and then again the bedroom. He was still at this half an hour later when the call Jamison expected came through from Scotland Yard. Pons stood listening, the ghost of a smile on his face.

Jamison put down the telephone and turned a perplexed face to Pons. "Prints on the nails, Pons," he said.

"Identifiable?"

"Yes. But not identified. No record."

Pons turned to Holt. "Will you bring me a glass, Mr. Holt—an ordinary tumbler?"

"Certainly sir."

Holt slipped into the kitchen and back, carrying the glass.

"Just hand it to Inspector Jamison, Mr. Holt. . . . Carefully now, Jamison. Just compare those prints with the prints found on Howells's nails."

For an instant Jamison froze. The tableau held. Jamison stared at Pons, the expression on Holt's face melted. Then the scene exploded. Holt struck the glass from Jamison's hand, shattering it, and in the next instant sprang for the window. But Pons was upon him with the liveness and speed of a cat and brought him to the floor.

"I give you the murderer of Lily MacLain, Jamison," said Pons panting.

"But how did you come to this, Pons?" asked Jamison, still shaken, after Holt had been removed by two constables.

"If Lily MacLain was stabbed only once, and Howells was felled in the act of attempting to stab her again, how could it be that his prints can be found *in her blood* on the handle of the knife?" Pons shook his head. "No, Jamison, it won't wash. Howells helped to implicate himself for the charge, but he isn't guilty. Holt killed her after he struck Howells down, then rolled Howells's prints on to the

handle of the knife. And isn't it a little far-fetched to believe that a man bent on murder would come without a weapon?"

"But what reason had Holt for killing his aunt?"

"He had the strongest of motives. As his aunt's only heir, he would lose her not inconsiderable estate if she married, as evidently she contemplated doing. If you'll proceed on the assumption that Holt did not tell the truth, and that Howells and Gerald King *are* telling the truth, all the pieces of this little puzzle will fall into place. Spilsbury will supply all the scientific evidence you need."

"Extraordinary," I said, as we left the house in Oakley Street. "Yet the affair offers clear proof of the fallibility of Lily MacLain's clairaudience."

"Miss Lily MacLain's clairaudience may have been considerably more brilliant than either of us is prepared to admit," answered Pons.

"Prescience there was, certainly," I went on, "which is the mark of ordinary intelligence; there's nothing extra-sensory about it. But why did she come to us? And why, if she were not fallible, did she accuse Howells—or, by the name he used, 'Green'?"

"I fail to recall that she did," answered Pons as he hailed a cab coming past in the dawn light. "I submit, Parker, that she told us, as well as she could, that her nephew planned to murder her and put it on someone else."

"Oh, come, Pons!" I cried in protest.

We got into the cab and Pons did not speak for a few moments. Then he answered. "Part of the faculty of observation is a keen ear. You failed to listen. She said 'Green' had threatened her. He had begun to make fairly regular visits and created scenes. He usually did this when he was under the influence, which made him all the easier for Holt to handle. Now, I put it to you, Parker, that a man who means to kill very seldom goes out of his way to warn his victim; no, with each visit to annoy Lily MacLain, Howells was increasingly less likely to kill. Do you fancy our late client was unaware of this? I daresay not."

"Pons, I distinctly recall her saying she would die by his hand."

"No, no, Parker. You didn't listen carefully. She said she would be murdered. She said, 'A knife will be used. This man will come to my house in the night.' She did *not* say he would kill her. Her exact words were, 'As a result of his coming, I will die.' So she did.

"That she could have done more to prevent her death, I have no

doubt. Why she did not must remain a puzzle. Her nephew served as her eyes. She did nothing without him. As she had depended upon that companion who died, she now depended upon him. Soon her situation became subtly altered—she could do nothing without his permission, she could not escape him even when she sensed that his greed for her possessions was overpowering, and her clairaudient powers—or intuition, if you like—told her he would attempt her life. Howells's loud threats gave her the chance to come here, and her nephew fell in with her plan because he knew how well it would serve him. Having thus set the stage, as he thought, Holt had only to wait until Howells came again, then keep him there until he was ready to do his shameful deed."

"Intuition, then—not clairaudience," I said.

"Was it intuition or extra-sensory power which caused her to invite my particular attention to the means of her death: the knife? It is folly to believe that anyone bent on killing another would put himself in the position of searching an unfamiliar house for a weapon instead of bringing his own. It will not be given to either of us to decide whether or not she was genuinely clairaudient," finished Pons enigmatically. "I fancy Lily MacLain will have the final word, Parker."

This, in the succession of cases which came to Pons's attention in the following months—among them those foreseen by Lily MacLain—she did.

The Adventure of the Proper Comma

WHEN I look over my notes on the problems which commanded the attention of my astute friend, Solar Pons, during the early 1930s, I find myself faced with some difficulty in the selection of a typical adventure. For that period included, among others, the singular case of Hrenville, the paralytic mendicant, and his remarkable macaw; the perplexing riddle of Lily MacLain and her extraordinary clairaudience; and the horrible affair of the Tottenham Werewolf. But the story which comes to the fore is none of these; it is rather that lesser adventure which I have filed in my notes as that of the Lady in Grey, though Pons is adamant in maintaining that it is more correctly referred to as "The Adventure of the Proper Comma."

It came to Pons's attention from an uncommon source; perhaps no other adventure ever reached him by way of the little group of urchins he often asked to assist him, and whom he called his Praed Street Irregulars—bright, alert lads, always willing to lend what unobtrusive assistance they could for an honest shilling. As boys, they were able to go unnoticed in many places where Pons would have drawn attention, and they were thus on occasion of invaluable help to him.

Early one evening in March, David Benjamin, a shock-haired youth, swarthy in the darkness of his skin and the acknowledged leader of the Praed Street Irregulars, came apologetically up the stairs and knocked almost timidly on the door.

"Ah, that is one of the boys," said Pons, raising his head. "Fearful of rousing Mrs. Johnson, I daresay. Open to him, Parker."

I opened the door and revealed David in the act of snatching his cap from his head.

"Come in, David, come in," said Pons with hearty invitation. "What is troubling you, lad?"

"Mr. Pons, sir," said the boy, walking into the room. "We thought as 'ow you ought ter see this."

He handed Pons a stone so small as to be almost a pebble. Pons seized on it with interest and held it under the lamp on the table. I bent forward, ranging myself beside him where he leaned over the

stone in his palm. Scratched crudely on the surface, apparently with a pin or similar tool, were two words:

HELP, PLEASE

Pons viewed David with narrowed eyes. "Where did you get this, David?"

"We went down Walworth way today, sir. Bert, 'e's got 'n aunt near the Elephant and Castle, an' we went down ter visit 'er."

He began to talk with more animation, now that it was plain that he had not come in vain, for Pons's interest was manifest. Bert's cousin, having shown his visitors all about the premises of his parents, took them on a tour of the neighbourhood. They had ended up at a strange, walled place some distance away from the house at which they had been visiting, but in one or two places there were wrought-iron gates breaking the continuity of the stone walls. They had clustered about one of these gates and were peering into the grounds, where men and women in grey uniforms were walking about within the enclosure, all apparently accompanied by guards or companions to watch over them, when suddenly a woman in a grey uniform had run toward the gate, closely pursued by a guard, who reached her just as she got to the gate, which was securely locked and barred. She had caught David's eye—he was the oldest of the four boys—and, as she clung to the bars of the gate, the stone had slipped from her fingers to the ground at David's feet. Her right hand bore a crooked scar across the back near the wrist. The guard had pulled her roughly away, and returned to the gate to chase them away. David had retrieved the stone. As soon as he had seen what was written upon it, he had consulted with his companions, who were unanimously of the opinion that it should be brought to 7B, Praed Street, and delivered to Solar Pons without delay.

"So's soon as I got back home, I came round with it," finished David.

"And quite right, too, David. Here." He fished a half-crown out of his pocket and gave it to David, who smiled gratefully. "Now I'll just keep this stone. I may need you again, and I'll send word to you if I do. We shall just look into this."

David thanked him and took his departure, clattering down the stairs in marked contrast to the stealth of his entry.

"That was surely a wasted coin," I said.

"I doubt that any contribution toward the development of the faculty of observation in man is ever truly wasted, Parker," said Pons thoughtfully, contemplating the stone. "Why do you say so?"

I could not help smiling. "Because I recognized the place from the boy's description. It is the private sanitarium of Dr. Sloane Sollaire. For mental patients, of course. That stone is only a pathetic but typical gesture to be expected from people who are sufficiently deranged to be incarcerated."

"Indeed," murmured Pons, still turning the stone in his fingers. "I wonder that you can be so dogmatic, Parker."

"Medicine is my field, Pons," I replied, not without some satisfaction.

"Ah, I would be the last to dispute it. But I fancy there are nooks and crannies of the torso as well as of the mind about which even our best medical men are not yet comprehensively informed."

"True," I conceded.

"Who knows the vagaries of the human mind? Indeed, I myself am the last to claim such knowledge. I find it constantly refreshing to probe and peer into the depths. At the moment I am intrigued by this message. I could not help reflecting, as I listened to David's account, how slyly it was done, how cleverly."

"Oh, some of those poor people are very cunning."

"Paper is obviously denied them. But pins and a stone! There is tenacity there, Parker."

"They are tenacious, too."

"I daresay they are occasionally everything normal, sane people are, is it not so?"

"There are times, yes, when. . . ."

"Even grammatical," said Pons, putting the stone before me.

There was an undeniable comma properly placed between the two words scratched so laboriously upon the surface of the stone.

"I submit, Parker, that grammatical accuracy is not a common attribute of deranged individuals, particularly of those who are making so frantic an appeal for help as this."

"My dear fellow," I protested, "there is no hard and fast line between the sane and the insane."

"How true!" He gazed at me quizzically, his dark eyes intent and distant. "We have been in the doldrums recently, and I fancy this is as good a time as any to improve my knowledge of the insane in our institutions. Tomorrow I will have you incarcerate me in Dr. Sollaire's sanitarium."

"What?" I cried out. "Pons, you aren't serious!"

"I was never more so."

"But it is such a mad scheme!"

"Ah, I shall be mad as a hatter, if necessary. I have always had a fondness for Alice's table companions."

"Pons, I don't like Dr. Sollaire."

"You are trying to prejudice me, Parker," Pons bantered.

"His reputation. . . ."

"Pray permit me to discover it for myself."

"Oh, come," I cried impatiently, "Sollaire is not a man to be taken lightly. I have reason to believe him dangerous, and his establishment no less so."

"There is always a fascination about danger," countered Pons. "And things have been uncommonly dull of late."

I shrugged and gave up for the evening, determined to talk him out of his mad plan in the morning.

But the following day found Pons up with the sun and about one of his most detestable pursuits – revolver-practise in the front room which served as our sitting-room and study. The sharp crack of his weapon woke me, and when I came from my bedroom I found not the familiar companion of most of my days but an unrecognizable fellow in the guise of a middle-class merchant of some means and a woeful inability to select his clothing. Indeed, had it not been for Pons's addiction to revolver-practise, I should have had grave doubts that the gentleman into whom he had transformed himself was indeed the companion of my quarters, for he had made up his face so skillfully, and without the addition of any hirsute adornment, that he did certainly resemble far more the slightly deranged individual he had set out to become than Solar Pons. Tossing his revolver to one side, he collapsed his chest, hunched his shoulders, losing height, and clasped his hands nervously before him, thus still further retreating into his role.

"Mr. Samuel Porter, late of Canada, at your service, Parker," he said in a rasping voice, totally unlike his own.

"You are determined to go through with it, then?" I asked, sitting down to breakfast.

"I am."

"On nothing more than a poor lunatic's pebble?"

"On less – so little a thing as a properly placed comma."

He sat down opposite me. "I shall take the role of a retired businessman who has gone over the edge worrying about his Canadian investments, which have recently taken a little drop, as

you will see by the financial columns of *The Times*. I have been visiting relatives in London—I leave you to produce them, if necessary—and you are committing me for observation, but not molestation. I must have a relatively free hand within such boundaries as are allowed me."

"Pons, I hope I can dissuade you from this wild scheme," I protested.

"Say no more, Parker. I shall expect to be committed this morning. Pray make the necessary arrangements, and plan to call on me tomorrow afternoon."

Accordingly, since Pons was adamant, and after a lengthy telephone conversation with Dr. Sollaïre, I delivered Pons in mid-morning to the private sanitarium in the vicinity of the Elephant and Castle, and left him with profound misgivings in the care of a man who, for all his impressive reputation, was little more than a charlatan in medicine.

After a restless night, impatient at the slow passage of time, I presented myself at Sollaïre's sanitarium for a consultation with my patient. I was shown into a visiting-room, and presently Pons, whom I had described as a patient who was excitable and much given to talking to himself, was ushered into my presence. He stood glowering at me just past the threshold until the attendant left us; then he came forward hesitantly, acting his part perfectly.

"It is Dr. Parker?" he asked.

"Come, sit down, Mr. Porter," I replied. "Are you enjoying your rest here?"

Pons came forward, saying in a loud voice, "They treat me very well. But it is expensive, is it not? And who is to pay for it?" To this he added in a whisper, "What a model of fusty stuffiness you are, Parker!"

"Please speak freely," I said.

He gave a barely perceptible shake of his head, by which I understood that we might be under optical or auditory observation, but he seated himself near me and began to talk a farrago of nonsense, dropping his voice from time to time ostensibly to mutter to himself but in reality to convey to me some vital information. The lady with the scarred hand, he had discovered, was the second wife of Dr. Gerald Buxton, a well-known London practitioner. She did not believe herself insane, but did not actually know her condition, which was not typical of a deranged person. Pons had caught her attention and would manage to talk to her again. He intended that he should remain here for another day, until the hour

at which the patients were permitted to walk about the grounds, which was between three and four o'clock in the afternoon.

Having imparted this information, he proceeded to give me a set of instructions, which, stripped of the nonsense he talked in character, came to this:

"Present yourself here at three-fifteen tomorrow afternoon to remove me either temporarily or permanently. You will employ a cab, preferably with Alfie More driving it. Alfie is to be told to follow my orders no matter what occurs. You may be knocked down and left behind, as much a victim as Mrs. Buxton's attendant. Reach David Benjamin and persuade him to have the Irregulars at the carriage entrance to create a diversion as soon as the gate is opened for us, and generally to impede pursuit."

Since all this was put to me *sotto voce*, I could not protest. "But, my dear Mr. Porter," I said in some alarm, "if the conditions for you here are not satisfactory, what do you intend I should do for you?"

"I'm going back to Canada," he announced in a loud voice, and added, "I intend to abduct Mrs. Buxton."

I gasped. "Think it over for another day, at least," I implored.

"I have made up my mind," replied Pons, and rose.

I presented my compliments to Dr. Sollaire, a tall, ascetic man clad in a black frock-coat, wearing a Vandyke beard on his weak chin and pince-nez over his grey eyes, and made a report to him.

"Your patient - " he glanced at a file on his desk "ah, Mr Porter—makes no complaint, Dr. Parker?"

"None, sir," I answered. "But he is restless. I have persuaded him to take an additional day. He now believes that he wishes to go back to Canada, and I may sanction the journey."

"There is no history of violence?"

"None, Doctor. The man is utterly wrapped up in himself and his troubles. He may be given every liberty, except, of course, his freedom. I will expect to call for him, unless he changes his mind, tomorrow afternoon."

I rose. Dr. Sollaire came to his feet also, leaning forward with his grey eyes fixed on me.

"Tell me, Dr. Parker - we have your surgery address, but not your home address - are you not the same medical man who makes his home with Mr. Solar Pons?"

I saw no reason to deny a fact which could have been discovered so readily.

"An extraordinary man," murmured Dr. Sollaire.

"There are those who think so," I agreed.

He raised his eyebrows. "Do I detect a note of hesitation?"

"I could not say. But Pons's methods are certainly not those of a physician, sir," I said with a heat I did not find it necessary to manufacture.

He smiled. "Very well, Dr. Parker. We shall wait upon your wishes in the best interests of the patient."

I went about following Pons's instructions with profound doubt of his wisdom. While it was manifest that he intended to exclude me as a suspect in his plot—so much was in his promise that I might be knocked down and left behind—I was nevertheless gravely uneasy over the part he required me to play in a scheme which was fundamentally illegal.

Promptly at the designated hour, I presented myself at Dr. Sollaire's sanitarium, paid my respects to its director with a request that a statement be sent to me, and then sat to await Pons's coming. He came presently, arguing volubly with his attendant, and I immediately asked him whether he had determined to leave and attempt a trip to Canada. That he had was evident, for the attendant carried the small bag he had taken with him to his voluntary incarceration. Remaining in character, he answered that he had, and went on to talk such nonsense that the attendant shrugged and grinned.

The three of us made our way from the grim building into the walled yard, where other patients now walked about together with attendants. Alfie More and his cab waited at the carriage entrance, toward which the attendant spurted ahead in order to open the gate and stand on guard against any attempt at escape of any other patient.

Just as we were about to pass from the grounds, Pons stopped doggedly before the opened gate.

"I won't go," he cried. "They've kept my razor."

"Come, come," I said soothingly. "I'll get you another."

"I want my own. It was my father's. I hid it in the table drawer in that room."

The attendant came forward. "He's mistaken, Doctor. He didn't bring any razor. He hasn't touched his face, and we didn't shave him. Your orders."

"Yes, yes, I know," I answered nervously.

During this altercation, a young and not unattractive woman had moved in our direction, accompanied by her attendant, a burly fellow who promised to offer Pons more difficulty than he had bargained for. Just a few steps away stood Alfie More's cab, the door swung wide, waiting on our entrance; no one was in sight save an elderly woman walking down the far side of the street, which was a narrow side street debouching upon the thoroughfare beyond.

"Come now, Mr. Porter," I said persuasively. "We're off to Canada."

At this moment, the lady in grey came up rapidly, crying, "Oh, what are they doing to that poor man?" with her attendant at her heels, calling, "'Ere, now, Missus. 'Ere, come away from that gate."

Suddenly Pons leaped from his role. With one sweep of his arm, he knocked me against his own attendant with such force that both of us went sprawling. With a sharp jab of his fist, he floored the lady's attendant. Almost in the same movement, he took her by the hand and hustled her into the cab even as both attendants were coming to their feet. As if by magic, the Praed Street Irregulars materialized from nowhere, crowding, with shouts and cries, between the cab and the attendants, tripping, pummeling, and generally harrying them, as well as myself, for I had come to my feet and ran, shouting, after the fast-vanishing cab. Behind us an alarm bell had begun to ring, but the cab was already out of sight, and with its passage from the narrow side street, the Irregulars, too, melted away like mist.

I turned to face Dr. Sollaire, who stood controlling himself as best he could.

"The address of his relatives, quickly, Doctor," he said. "We must lose no time. That woman is dangerous—dangerous."

I gave him the address of the mythical Samuel Porter's "nephew," amid my protestations and apologies, to which Sollaire paid not the slightest attention. He hastened off with the address, leaving me to stand in the street as if I had ceased to exist.

It was two hours before I returned to my Praed Street lodgings. I had not thought it prudent to go anywhere but to my surgery, having paused en route only long enough to telephone a warning to "Porter's nephew." I found Pons alone in the living-room, his lean figure bent over a reference volume I could not at once identify. He did not look up at my entrance, but manifestly recognized my step.

"Ah, Parker, I fear I was too rough with you this afternoon. My apologies."

"It's nothing," I answered. "But what the devil are you up to? The police have been at my surgery, putting me through it. Porter, of course, has disappeared."

"Vanished without trace," he agreed. "That is what the papers will say."

"What have you done with Mrs. Buxton?"

"I have given her a sedative and allowed her to sleep. She is in your room."

"My room!"

"Pray do not alarm yourself, Parker. You will double with me tonight."

"Have you notified her husband?"

"I fancy he will pay us a call before too long a time has elapsed." He gave me a long, searching glance. "What do you know of Dr. Gerald Buxton, Parker?"

"Oh, Harley Street connections. Dowagers' doctor. Exorbitant charges. A high liver who throws away his money at the races and elsewhere."

"He himself had his wife confined."

"Of course. Pons, I warned you that you were making a mistake."

"Ah, but the lady made none. Mrs. Buxton is the second wife. She was the former Angeline Magoun. Does that convey anything to you?"

"Oh, yes, of course. Daughter of the late soap magnate, Andrew Magoun. An only child, too."

"An only heir," added Pons dryly. "Dr. Buxton's first wife died in a sanitarium in Bristol. I submit that it is more than a coincidence that two of his wives should go mad. I submit, moreover, that it is even more of a coincidence that both the ladies should be heiresses—in a minor way, of course, but yet, heiresses—and well insured, leaving Dr. Gerald Buxton beneficiary."

I stared at him open-mouthed for a minute before I found my voice. "Pons, Buxton may be what medical men tend to call a 'hand-holder,' but he has no need to be what you are suggesting he is."

"And, finally, I respectfully draw your attention to recently published gossip that Dr. Buxton has been seen escorting yet a third young lady, likewise an heiress, to Covent Garden and certain imported American plays. Dear me, but he is an enterprising man!"

"He has a devoted following."

"Indeed! As Despréaux says, *Un sot trouvé toujours un plus sot qui l'admire*. Above all else, pray remember that Dr. Buxton must

not know of his wife's presence in our quarters. I daresay the man is no fool; he will not spend much time looking for Mr. Samuel Porter when once he learns of your connection with me."

"And his wife—what had she to say?"

"Buxton had her committed three months ago. She has lost weight; her dresses no longer fit her. She believes she is being slowly and systematically poisoned. Buxton sends in her own medicines; Dr. Sollaire and his staff discreetly look the other way. He is not a pleasant man, your Dr. Sollaire, but alas! one who has managed to keep himself out of the hands of the law for the time being. If she is to be believed, her husband has no such elite practise as to justify his lavish expenditures; he has had himself declared her guardian, and forced her to sign a power of attorney to him. She and her fortune are thus at his mercy."

At this moment a cab which had been coming down the street at a swift pace drew up at our door, and within moments the outer door of our lodgings was wrenched open with some violence, followed by the pounding ascent of someone on the stairs.

"A big man, in a hurry," said Pons tranquilly. "Pray contain yourself, Parker. He would appear given to violence of word and deed."

The door of our quarters was opened without ceremony, and our visitor thrust himself into the room where we stood. He was certainly a big man, large of frame, porcine, with a florid, full face, sensuous lips surmounted by a bushy moustache, and protruding eyes, which glared at us in fury.

"Dr. Buxton, I presume," said Pons, smiling.

"Ah, you know me. That is not a coincidence," said Buxton from between tight lips. His lower jaw thrust out, and his fingers trembled on the heavy ebony cane he carried.

"I make it my business to know a good many people, Dr. Buxton," Pons nodded in my direction. "My companion, Dr. Lyndon Parker."

Buxton gave me a contemptuous glance. "Your lackey, sir. I am not deceived. Where is my wife?"

"Do you have reference to the wife already disposed of or the one whose case is under review?"

Buxton grew almost purple with rage. He raised his cane and shook it at Pons, but in a moment leaned forward, one hand flat on the table between him and Pons, and said in a choked voice, "I know you, Mr. Solar Pons. You meddling busybody! I warn you don't get in my way, or I'll break you—like this."

He dropped his cane to the table as he spoke, snatched up a broom which our long-suffering landlady had left behind, and broke it with one angry motion. In answer, Pons reached down, took up our visitor's heavy cane, snapped it in mid-air, and handed the pieces to Buxton.

"Pray do not forget your stick, Doctor."

For a moment the two men faced each other in silence. Then Buxton turned with an inarticulate growl of rage and made his way out of our lodgings as stormily as he had come in, flinging the pieces of his ebony cane to the floor.

"A dangerous man," I said, after the outer door had slammed. "And an angry man."

"Say rather a badly frightened man," retorted Pons.

He went around, picked up the pieces of Buxton's cane, and threw them into the fireplace. Then he returned to the table, taking something from his pocket.

"Mrs. Buxton had presence of mind enough to bring along two of the capsules she has been taking at her husband's direction. An analysis of their contents might prove interesting and informative."

"Pons, he would hardly dare poison her."

"Would he not, indeed? Dr. Sollaire sees only what is convenient for him to see. She has not been mistreated; every attendant can and would testify to that. Dr. Sollaire can produce a case history to show her steady decline and physical deterioration. If Buxton raised no question, no one else would be likely to; no near family relatives would survive her. You are too willing to suspend the faculty of belief, Parker. This man is wilful, devious, dark; he brooks no interference. He may well return here with a warrant within twelve hours; by that time Mrs. Buxton will be in the care of Sir Francis Jeffers, to whom I explained the circumstances over the telephone. I daresay Buxton will think twice before challenging the opinion of so distinguished an alienist."

"Pons, he will find a way to get her back."

"I think not. She will see her solicitor after Sir Francis has seen her. Once she has gone that far, Buxton is finished. It remains to be seen to what lengths he may go before then. I have a surprise or two in store for him yet." He rubbed his hands together with evident relish. "Now then, Parker, let us get on with an analysis of Dr. Buxton's prescription."

When I returned from Thorndyke & Polton with an analysis of the capsules Mrs. Buxton had carried with her, I found Sir Francis

Jeffers listening to Pons's story. Sir Francis, an austere, bemonocled man past middle age, nodded gravely to me, his narrowed eyes flashing only briefly in my direction.

"Dr. Parker has had Mrs. Buxton's capsules analyzed," explained Pons. "Come, Parker, tell us what you found. I observe my guess was not wide of the mark."

"Sulphonal. Each capsule contained 0.64 gram."

Sir Francis gazed at me speculatively. "Ah, the design is to prolong life for some months. What was the prescription?"

"I think we can ascertain that by asking the lady," said Pons. "If I am not mistaken, I hear her stirring."

He rose as he spoke, excused himself, and vanished in the direction of my chamber, from which he returned in a few moments escorting a raven-haired woman of thirty or thereabouts, who clung to his arm almost tenaciously.

"Mrs. Buxton, may I present Sir Francis Jeffers and Dr. Lyndon Parker?"

She nodded without speaking, her eyes looking warily from one to the other of us. Her hands were trembling, her thin-lipped mouth was stubborn, her wan face clearly betrayed ill health.

"Mrs. Buxton, how long were you with Dr. Sollaire?" asked Sir Francis gently.

"Six weeks, I think."

"And the capsules your husband prescribed for you? How often have you taken them?"

"Daily – until I began to think there was something wrong."

"Will you tell us how you came to be where Mr. Pons found you?"

"My husband put me there."

"Against your will?"

She smiled tiredly. "No. But he kept me there against my will. He had always been very kind to me, very considerate. I had no reason to distrust him. He told me I was not well, and I did feel unwell after a while. He said there was nothing physically wrong, but that my mental health might be affected. He suggested a short stay at the sanitarium. I did what he asked. But I did not feel that I was so unstable as to justify his keeping me there; yet every time I asked him to move me, he put me off, and at last I understood that he did not mean to take me away from there at all. I was closely guarded most of the time. My letters were not delivered; I could not telephone or wire, nothing. I tried everything. Once I threw a letter over the wall, but they recovered it, and after that I was denied

paper and pen. Then, that little stone — oh! I am so grateful to that boy, whoever he is, and to you, Mr. Pons."

"Give me your hands, Mrs. Buxton," commanded Sir Francis.

Unhesitatingly she surrendered her hands. He held them for a few moments in his, gently touching her palms, then clasped them together and patted them reassuringly.

"You are nervous, tired, ill, Mrs. Buxton. I am sure it is not serious now that we can dispense with your husband's capsules. Will you put yourself in my care?"

"Certainly," she answered at once. "But I must see my solicitor to cancel the power of attorney I gave my husband."

"And who is he?"

"Leonard Runciman. He will be at his home at this hour, I am confident."

"Very good. My car is downstairs. May I send you to Mr. Runciman with my driver? I will join you there in a little while."

"If you will, please."

"I have telephoned him," said Pons.

"Thank you."

Sir Francis saw her solicitously from our quarters. Pons shielded her from weather by shrouding her in his Inverness, and stood at the window looking down to see that she was safely dispatched.

"One never knows the extent of a brute like Buxton's persistence," he murmured. "Ah, there she goes. Sir Francis is coming back."

He turned from the window to face the door in the familiar pose with his hands clasped behind him, and his feral features almost haughty in their strong aquilinity. He spoke as soon as Sir Francis crossed the threshold.

"What do you make of her, Sir Francis?"

"I cannot be certain, but I think she is as sane as you or I. She has been through an ordeal, she is extremely nervous, she is unsure of herself. But she has a hard inner core of resistance, she will come out of it all right. You did her a singular service, Mr. Pons."

"Her condition is consistent with the symptoms of sulphonal poisoning?"

"Certainly. Sulphonal probably accounts for it. She will need care. What a fiendish plan! I can hardly conceive of her husband's doing it."

"Not only once — but twice. His previous wife, too, died in an institution."

"Good God! What manner of man can he be?"

Pons's alert ears caught the sound of wheels outside. He smiled grimly.

"If I am not in error, you may find out," he answered.

Once more the outer door was flung open with a crash; once again came that insistently demanding pounding up the stairs, once again the door of our quarters was opened without the formality of a knock, and Dr. Gerald Buxton stood there somewhat disheveled, carrying a new stick, his porcine features flushed with anger still.

"Mr. Pons, I've come for my wife. I should warn you your quarters are surrounded."

Pons stepped tranquilly to the windows facing Praed Street and gazed down. "Ah, you have brought your bully boys," he murmured. "I had thought you might be so unwise as to go to the police."

"Sir, my wife!" repeated Buxton.

"You are too late, Dr. Buxton," answered Pons. "She is in the care of Sir Francis Jeffers, who is, I fancy, a better authority on sanity than you, sir."

"You prying scoundrel!" shouted Buxton in a rage, half raising his cane in a threatening gesture.

"Ah, yes, I think to pry farther still, my dear fellow. An application to the Home Office for an exhumation of the body of your first wife might be in order."

Buxton smiled sardonically. "You must think me a fool, you meddling detective." His voice dripped contempt.

"On the contrary, I have a high regard for your abilities, if not your methods, Dr. Buxton," replied Pons. "You were doubtless clever enough to avoid the use of any poison which might be detected so late. But there is little need to prolong this painful scene. The capsules you were giving your wife were analyzed this evening, and the sulphonal in them, at least, is still evident. Your wife has canceled your power of attorney, and will begin an action against you tomorrow. Your little plans, Dr. Buxton, will not materialize this time in quite the patterns you designed. The capsules, together with your wife's story and my deposition, will be in the hands of Scotland Yard before midnight. Pray allow me to bid you good-evening."

Buxton stood briefly as one transfixed. Not a flicker of emotion crossed his face, and one arm was still upraised in a gesture of threatening defiance. He might have been statuary for the moment

after Pons had finished speaking. If he saw his house of cards collapse, if he visualized what the newspapers would do to him, if he saw his private world destroyed, he gave no sign. Then his face whitened, a kind of explosive sound burst from his thick lips, he turned and ran down the stairs without troubling to shut the door after him.

Sir Francis broke the silence with a discreet cough.

"Paranoid," he said with conviction. "Certifiable."

"A man given to violence. But his wife is now beyond his reach. Upon whom will he turn next?" said Pons. "We shall hear of him again."

Nor was Pons in error. The morning papers carried word of Dr. Gerald Buxton. He had shot himself in his Harley Street quarters.

The Adventure of the Bishop's Companion

"AN ELDERLY WOMAN," said Solar Pons, raising his head from his chemical problem at the first sound from the foot of the stairs to our quarters at 7B, Praed Street one May morning in 1932.

"At this hour?" I cried. "Why it is scarcely eight—the day has but begun."

"Ah, Parker, *your* day, perhaps, but not hers."

The steps mounted slowly to the landing and ended with a timid knock. Pons strode across the room and threw the door wide.

"Why, it is Mrs. Parton, is it not?" he cried.

"I am surprised you remember me, Mr. Pons."

An old woman, wearing an absurd hat of black straw from which a daisy stuck up and wilted downward, with a shawl about her rounded shoulders, and an ankle-length dress in brown to complete her costume, walked diffidently into the room.

"Parker, you will surely remember Mrs. Parton, who was of some little help to us in that affair of the Gentle Entomologists," continued Pons. "Pray sit down, Mrs. Parton." He thrust forward a chair.

Ten years ago! I would hardly have recognized her, so much had change and time altered her appearance. She had lost weight—shrunk together, as it were—and was now an old woman who had been then a buxom lady on the fading edge of middle age. She nodded and smiled at me, gave me her hand, and sat down.

"Seeing as how I was in London, Mr. Pons, I thought I'd just step around and tell you my trouble—if you'd not take it amiss," she said with the air of one who did not expect Pons to object.

"By all means, Mrs. Parton," said Pons, with that unfailing courtesy that always struck me as in such contrast to his views of women and wedded bliss. "Let us hear about your trouble. And with whom is it?"

"The Bishop!" she said with spirit, her dark eyes snapping. "Bishop Lamson. That's who."

"Lamson: of Norwich," mused Pons. "But he has been retired for seven years."

"Indeed, he has. And lives in my village, Mr. Pons. Retired and

shut up, you might say. But I'm not the one to talk about him or anybody, Mr. Pons, I am not. But why did he now, after baptizing my grandson Peter half a year gone, set about and send me a bill? Think of it! Did we not make a freewill offering? Indeed we did. But he sent me a bill, and I went round and told him right off I would pay no such bill. Five pounds for a baptism! Mr. Pons, it's an outrage, it's a — a libel on the Church of England."

Pons's eyes began to twinkle. "Is it possible to libel the Church of England? I wonder. Five pounds, you say. Has he performed any other little services of similar nature for you, Mrs. Parton, since he came to Wilder's Weald?"

"Many a one, Mr. Pons."

"And sent you a bill?"

"Never!"

"Perhaps he is in his dotage," ventured Pons.

"He did not seem so to me," replied Mrs. Parton with asperity. "A bit muddled, perhaps, and still shaken up over the loss of his companion three months ago. But no more."

"His curate?"

Mrs. Parton shook her head. "Another old fellow come down from London to live with him in his retirement. Kept to himself. He sickened a while back and next thing we knew he was dead. Pneumonia. They two never suspected it — the Bishop nor he — but the Bishop kept a-nursing him till he was almost gone, and then he sent after Dr. Prendle, and that was an end of Mr. George Moulton. Buried and all, these months since. But it may have been," said Mrs. Parton with a momentary hesitation in her voice, "what was done to Mr. Moulton's stone in the churchyard. Knocked about and markings scratched on — vandals' work, Mr. Pons. It may have been that upset him — but hardly to the point of quarreling with me. Now, Mr. Pons, what am I to do? Pay for his service — and I should think not — or refuse him?"

She fixed Pons with bright expectant eyes.

"You have remonstrated with His Lordship?"

"I tried."

"Ah, he would not see you?"

"Oh, 'twas not that. He saw me, but he would not talk of it. He had a bad cold and was forever coughing. Truth to tell, he had the look of a sick man. And what good would it have done? He's that absent-minded he'd have forgotten the freewill offering even if it were made but two days ago."

"Ah, well, Mrs. Parton, perhaps that is the solution of the matter—he simply forgot that he had been paid for his service."

"It wasn't, you see, Mr. Pons, that he *had* to baptize Peter. He needn't have done it. Mr. Newell could've taken care of it, only my son had a fancy to have the Bishop do it, so I spoke to him and he did it."

Mrs. Parton punctuated her lines with little nods, so that the daisy on her hat was forever dancing and swaying.

"Ah, Mrs. Parton, I am sure this little disagreement will iron itself out," said Pons placatingly. "When the Bishop has recovered from his cold, you go around to see him and explain that the service was paid for—just jog his memory a bit."

"I tried," said Mrs. Parton indignantly. "He wouldn't hear of it. Just kept coughing and waving me off."

"And if he insists upon being paid," continued Pons, "do let me know and I will look into the matter for you."

Mrs. Parton got to her feet, her plain face showing her gratification.

The door had hardly closed upon her when I burst into laughter. "What must they think of you, Pons! Last week it was Mrs. Johnson's friend who wanted you to find her stray cat—a fortnight past that boy whose sack of marbles had been stolen—now it has come to collecting bills!"

"I fancy it is not precisely that, Parker. Rather the other way around." The twinkle had vanished from Pons's eyes, which now wore that thoughtful, pensive expression with which I was all too familiar.

"Pons, you could not have meant it seriously when you promised to take up the matter?"

"It did not seem to you to have some points of interest?" asked Pons in his most annoying manner.

"None," I replied firmly.

"It does not occur to you to wonder whether there might not be some connection between the desecration of Mr. Moulton's gravestone and Mrs. Parton's being sent an unwarranted bill?"

"What possible connection could there be?"

"Ah, that is precisely the problem that intrigues me."

"Why, we read constantly of such vandalism. It is primarily the work of adolescents bent upon mischief."

"True," agreed Pons. "But this is another of those coincidences that may have more significance than we dream of. I think we may



safely assume that Mrs. Parton is one of those individuals who are forever looking about to see how much they can get for nothing – a group to which most of mankind appears to belong; so in that she is certainly not in any way out of the ordinary. We may conclude that she has been in the habit of calling upon Bishop Lamson for various services for which she would have to pay the vicar. It is quite possible that His Lordship rebelled at last, and has sought to put a stop to the practise by imposing a heavy fee."

"I don't blame him. But he ought to have done it at the time of the baptism," I said. "I have my own idea of the size of that 'freewill offering.' "

"And I," agreed Pons.

"Particularly," I could not help adding, "since I noticed she made none to you."

"Mrs. Parton made no mention of the cemetery's being vandalized, however," Pons went on. "Only Moulton's stone. Is that not singular?"

"A coincidence."

"Of a kind I find suspect."

So saying, he took from its place a copy of the *Railway Guide*, and began to search through it.

"Pons, you cannot mean it seriously!"

"Nothing presses me at the moment, Parker. I have a fancy to run down to Sussex and pay Bishop Lamson a visit."

I held back the words I could have said, but I had no doubt Pons read them in my face, for he smiled impishly.

"Ah, here we are. We have ample time to take the next train at Victoria. Are you free?"

"I am always free for any adventure of yours," I said, somewhat stiffly, I fear, "though I should hate to see you come a cropper "

"A pity I cannot adequately reward your loyalty, Parker!"

Wilder's Weald was little more than a hamlet not far from the border of Surrey. It consisted of two score houses and a few shops, all on the one side of the railway station, across from which flowed a little brook through a swale now bright with kingcups and fritillaries in blossom. Its small but old church rose on the far edge of the village, with the vicar's home on the one side, and the churchyard on the other. And beyond the cemetery, as Pons ascertained from the porter at the station, was the home of Bishop Lamson.

Pons did not elect to call on His Lordship immediately, however. He went around to the cemetery, where we found the defaced stone that marked George Moulton's grave, and there we stood looking at it, while the wind carried through the churchyard the fragrance of the fields, and a lark sang overhead against the background music of a dog's bark rising at a distance. The stone had clearly been scarred, for someone had slashed the lettering.

"That was done with iron or steel," I said.

"Elementary," said Pons. "And, if I am not mistaken, in anger. Further, I submit it was not an act of adolescent vandalism. Adolescents are far more given to upsetting stones than to defacing them in this manner."

"There are always exceptions."

"True. But not, I fancy, in this case. Have you seen any evidence of other vandalism?"

"Let me just look about," I said.

I moved through the cemetery, from one gravestone to another. There were moss-encrusted stones dating back more than two centuries, weather-worn stones, plots overgrown with lilies-of-the-valley, stones almost hidden by rosebushes; there were generations of Cutlers, Swintons, Norrises, and even a Parker or two. But there was no other stone that bore any mark of desecration.

"None," ventured Pons at my return.

"None," I agreed. "Someone must not have liked Moulton."

"We might discuss the matter with the vicar," said Pons, "for, if I am not mistaken, that is he coming toward the cemetery from behind the church."

I turned to look. A spare gentleman of less than medium height was hastening in our direction. He had a ruddy face, two whitening tufts for eyebrows, and closely-clipped greying hair. His gaze was unmistakably bent upon us and the expression he wore was one of inquiry.

"Can I do anything for you, gentlemen?" he asked, as he came up to us.

"Mr. Newell, I presume?" said Pons, and introduced himself.

"I have read a thing or two of you, Mr. Pons," said the vicar with some manifest reservation.

"I have, unfortunately, no control over what is printed in the country's press," said Pons. Then, stepping aside a little, he pointed to the Moulton stone. "Pray tell me, sir, when was that vandalism done?"

"This past week — perhaps eight days ago. Or nights," said the vicar.

"Was this man so disliked?"

"Did you know him?" countered the vicar.

"No. But, since he was the Bishop's companion, I take it you did."

"Though it is not generally known, he was the Bishop's half brother, Mr. Pons. Forgive me for bearing witness against my neighbour, but I had the impression from my conversations with the Bishop before Moulton came that Moulton was a wastrel and now a derelict come to live out his misspent life with the Bishop. He came here from somewhere in Spain. And since he's been here, he went nowhere except now and then up to London. But he troubled no one, did the gardening and such, and kept to himself. Disliked?" he went on, returning to Pons's question. "I should hardly have thought anyone knew him well enough to dislike him."

"And you did not?"

"No, sir. I've had a word or two with him now and then when I had occasion to visit Bishop Lamson. And that wasn't often, for, you see, the Bishop is retired, and he is not *my* Bishop. If I passed Moulton in the garden, I gave him the time of day or made some comment on the flowers, hardly more."

"A big man?"

"Oh, no, Mr. Pons. A small, wiry fellow. One would hardly have thought he'd go so quick, but perhaps living on his half-brother's largesse was disheartening. He was a good man, though, surely, for he spent many hours in the church, where more than once I found him meditating at the foot of the altar, on his knees, too. Whatever his sins might have been, he certainly repented. And the Bishop has missed him grievously; he has hardly been out of the house since his death. But then, he is old, and he was never much given to going about. If he so much as attended a garden party, he would have a score of invitations thrust upon him; rather than establish a precedent, he accepted none. He prefers to spend his time with his books."

Pons looked thoughtfully again at the vandalized gravestone. Then he turned once more to the vicar. "Wilder's Weald would seem to be a small living, Mr. Newell."

"Very small." The vicar sighed.

"So that a stranger would be observed. Have you seen any such about?"

The vicar paused and visibly cast his thoughts backward. "Ah, there are always those who come to look at the village in search of the quaint. And those who take down inscriptions and epitaphs on the stones," he said reflectively.

"Within the past fortnight?"

The vicar nodded. "I seem to recall two ladies two Sundays past. And a single man after that."

"Dark?"

Newell started. "It is odd that you should say so, Mr. Pons. Uncommonly dark – but not coloured, definitely not coloured."

"Thank you. I daresay we might call on the Bishop."

The vicar looked dubious. "It might do no harm to try. He doesn't always answer a knock."

"We shall chance it."

Bidding the vicar good-day, we walked out of the cemetery and over to the Bishop's house, which was surrounded by a hedge of yew, and much embowered by trees, though there was a cleared space for a flower garden. The house itself was of brick, and, though it was not a new house, it wore an air of neatness and self-sufficiency, for it hugged the ground, and the door at the front stood under an arch of ivy, its leaves now agleam in the afternoon sun.

Pons strode up to the door and sounded the knocker.

Silence answered.

He knocked again, more peremptorily.

This time we could hear someone shuffling toward the door inside, and presently it opened only far enough to reveal that it was on a latch, for the chain was plainly visible.

A venerably bearded face looked out at us, dark eyes inquiring over spectacles. In his dark clothing and gaiters, the Bishop was scarcely visible, though his pectoral cross reflected the light.

"Bishop Lamson?" asked Pons.

"I am he," said the Bishop gravely. "What can I do for you?"

"We have come about the matter of the vandalism done to Mr. Moulton's gravestone."

I could not be sure, but I thought the Bishop looked momentarily startled. Then he murmured, "Oh, to be sure, gentlemen. Come in." He unlatched the door and swung it open, closed it behind us, and then shuffled ahead of us, asking us to "Please come this way." He added, "I was not aware that Constable Cowles had sent for outside help."

He led us into what must certainly have been his study, for it was

a room literally overwhelmed with books. Indeed, I saw now that the Bishop carried a book open in one hand, with a thumb in it to keep his place. He tumbled a little pile of books from a chair he passed, and then went on to the chair he must have left to answer our knock.

Facing us from his chair, he invited us to sit down, fixing inquiring eyes upon us—clear, brown, alert eyes that shone from under his beetling brows.

"My name is Solar Pons," said Pons, and introduced me.

Though Bishop Lamson made no sign to indicate that he had ever heard of Pons, I thought I detected a slight quickening of interest in his eyes.

"It is hardly worth the trouble to investigate, Mr. Pons," said the Bishop. "A boy's prank. I shall have the stone replaced."

"We understand that Mr. Moulton was your half-brother."

"Yes, that is true. I fear George was always a trifle wayward. When he came back to England at last, all the family were gone except myself. So he naturally came here. He was a faithful companion, Mr. Pons, and he was quite content to rusticate here."

"Where had he been?"

"Oh, somewhere on the Continent," said the Bishop vaguely. "He did tell me, but I am so absent-minded I have already forgotten."

"Spain?" asked Pons.

"Spain," repeated the Bishop, his eyes narrowing. "Dear me, you must have been making inquiries. Did Cowles send for you?"

"No, My Lord. A lady sent for us."

"Touching of her to be so concerned, whoever she was," murmured the Bishop.

If His Lordship were hinting that he would like to know our client's identity, Pons was not about to gratify him. Instead, he drew from an inner pocket a little black leather case, opened it and handed it to the Bishop.

"Does this photograph in any way resemble your late half-brother when he was a young man?" he asked.

Bishop Lamson took the case wonderingly and studied the photograph. Then he shook his head. "Nothing at all like George, Mr. Pons. Nothing. I cannot think where you obtained this or why you should have thought it might have resembled George."

He handed the leather case back to Pons, who restored it to his pocket, then rose to his feet.

"I am sorry to have troubled you, My Lord," said Pons crisply

"You've been no trouble, Mr. Pons, I assure you," replied the Bishop. But he did not rise to see us out. "I trust you can find the way."

"Indeed we can."

Pons thanked the Bishop and we withdrew.

Once outside, I could not forebear asking to see the photograph Pons had shown the Bishop.

"You would be all too familiar with it, Parker," Pons chuckled. "I found it in our quarters. It is an old one of you."

"Of me!" I cried.

"Yes, yes—any photograph would have done. You have such typically British features, Parker, that your photograph was ideal for my purpose." He paused to consult his watch. "The day is growing old, and we have one or two little matters yet to attend to. I see a stationer's shop over yonder. I want to send a note to Scotland Yard, and while I am about it, do be a good fellow and go around to the stationmaster to inquire whether he saw any stranger in the village—possibly getting off the train—in the course of the past fortnight or so. If I might venture to guess—a dark-skinned man."

"A Jamaican?"

"I have not said so," he answered testily.

I did as Pons asked.

The stationmaster/porter, who was the same man who had directed us to Bishop Lamson's home, was a middle-aged man who had his wits about him. Directly I asked my question, he had the answer for me.

"You must mean the foreign gentleman who asked for Bishop Lamson. He came in on the train a week ago or thereabouts."

"You've seen him since? When did he leave?"

"He didn't leave by train. But he could have walked away or gone by motorcar."

Pons waited for me on my return. He listened to what I had to report, but did not comment. When I had finished he said only, "If you have no objection, Parker, we'll just engage a room at the Bell Inn over yonder, and spend the night. I have one or two little inquiries yet to make before we go round to call on Bishop Lamson once more."

"I have no urgent case," I assured him.

But once in the room Pons engaged, I could hold off my questions no longer. Pons was clearly on the track of something.

which, as far as I could determine, was extremely nebulous. What was it?

"I put it to you, Parker," he replied, "that it is not just coincidence that a visitor inquiring for Bishop Lamson should arrive in Wilder's Weald at the same time that George Moulton's gravestone is desecrated."

"I confess I do not see any connection between those events."

"I submit that the visitor to Wilder's Weald was in search of George Moulton, not the Bishop, but asked for the Bishop because he had learned that Moulton lived with his half-brother."

"And, on learning from the Bishop that Moulton was dead, he was so disappointed that he went over to Moulton's grave and vandalized the stone," I finished. "I could hardly conceive of a more pointless act."

Pons smiled enigmatically. "All things are possible," he retorted.

"I know your scant respect for some members of the clergy," I went on. "Surely you do not suspect Bishop Lamson to be guilty of some skullduggery?"

"Did he impress you as the sort of man who, having served his church faithfully for all his life, would turn to something unethical in his retirement years?" asked Pons. "Come, Parker, say not so! Heaven forbid I should have infected you with some of that dubiety that comes so naturally to me!"

"By no means!"

"Splendid."

"But what is the problem?"

"I submit it is as plain as a pikestaff. The undeserved bill sent to Mrs. Parton. The defacing of George Moulton's stone. And," he added darkly, "I fear the Bishop is in it up over his head!"

"Incredible!" I cried.

"Is it not!" he replied, rubbing his hands energetically together. "But let us sleep on it."

In the morning we walked through the dew-fresh air, ringing with lark and chaffinch song, to the home of Bishop Lamson. The village was astir, but not yet the Bishop, for there was no response to our knock. Pons knocked yet louder. Still there was no response.

He set off around the house, pausing to notice that a side window was open and knocked at the rear door, which stood slightly ajar. Still there was no answer.

Pons ventured to push the door back. A sharp cry of dismay

escaped his lips as he pressed forward.

The door opened directly upon a kitchen but a kitchen in complete shambles – crockery, knives, forks, dishes, cups, towels everything had been thrown from the cupboards, some to lie broken on the floor.

"I fear we are too late," said Pons grimly.

He made his way through the shambles into the adjacent room. Here, too, everything was torn apart and strewn about. The open window we had observed led into this room. Pons stepped over to it, made but a brief scrutiny, and said, "Forced!"

"Bishop Lamson?"

Pons made no reply. He pushed into the study, where many of the books had been thrown to the floor from the shelves, and then at last came to the Bishop's bedchamber.

Though this room too was torn apart, with the bureau drawers emptied and the closet door ajar, showing how the clothing inside had been pulled out, it was the bed that drew my eyes as Pons stood aside for me to precede him. For it was literally drenched in blood – the Bishop's blood – sheets, blanket, spread – blood spattered the bedstead, the adjacent wall, the carpet and what had been Bishop Lamson lay in the middle of it, asprawl on his back on the bed, his arms flung wide, his throat cut, and repeated stab-wounds in his chest and abdomen, so that his pyjamas were soaked in blood.

I brushed past Pons and bent to examine the body, while Pons waited impatiently.

"Dead?" he asked finally.

"Since between midnight and two o'clock," I replied.

Thereupon Pons sprang into action like a hound on the scent. He examined the dead man's hands and discovered flesh clawed in under his fingernails. "So he had a few moments to attempt fighting off his assailant," he concluded. He uncovered part of a bloodstained footprint on the floor off the carpet, and measured it carefully. "We shall want a small man. He was barefooted here. He undoubtedly surprised his victim, but he came to kill him, and did so. Whatever he sought was looked for after the murder. See," pointed Pons, "here and there clothing lies over the bloodstains. But did he find what he sought?"

Careful to disturb nothing, Pons now went from room to room, until he came to a small bedroom under the gable upstairs. This

room had been only partially searched; the searcher had got down only to the second drawer in the small bureau, and there he had stopped. Some folded clothing had evidently been pulled out of this drawer, but a layer still remained undisturbed. Pons felt it delicately with the tips of his lean fingers.

"Some uneven object was hidden here," he deduced. "I should not be surprised to find that it was a pouch containing precious stones. Whatever it was, it appears to have been the goal of the thief's search."

He turned. "Come, Parker. We are finished here. Let us notify Constable Cowles. Then I must send a wire to the Yard asking them to cover all ports for a small, dark-skinned man, very probably a Spaniard, with at least two scratches down one side of his face, and in possession of a pouch of jewels.

"One little aspect of the matter," said Pons, as we came out of the post-office, "that continues to intrigue me, is the late George Moulton's devotion. Did he have the sound of a church-going man to you, Parker?"

"He did not."

"Yet the vicar told us he had spent many hours in church — at the foot of the altar, I believe he said."

"Those were his words."

"I have a fancy to view the spot."

I knew better than to challenge him when he bent his steps toward the church.

St. Christopher's proved to be a church built by an architect in love with the Gothic, and decorated under the direction of a High Church clergyman, for, though the well of the church was severe and spare, the altar was ablaze with ornaments, even to idolatrous statues and a large jeweled crucifix.

Pons made his way to the foot of the altar and stood for a few moments looking about him. The dim light entering through the coloured glass of the windows was caught on the jeweled ornaments of the crucifix and the altar. Pons moved closer to examine them.

"Glass?" I asked.

Pons chuckled. "I am no expert, but I fancy these are real. There is some evidence of recent workmanship."

"However could so small a parish afford them?"

"I submit they are not here by the will or even the knowledge of the parish — and that the stones that were here are even now being

carried across England in whatever it was that was taken from the gable room bureau in Bishop Lamson's house."

So saying, he turned, adding, "Come, let us go back to the Inn."

Once back in our quarters at the Inn, we found a wire from Scotland Yard waiting for us. Pons read it eagerly, nodded with satisfaction, and handed it to me.

GEORGE MOULTON THUMB AND FOUR FINGERS RIGHT HAND PETTY THIEF SOMEWHERE ON CONTINENT. JAMISON.

I looked up into Pons's quizzical eyes.

"Do you see it now, Parker?"

"Let me guess," I said. "George Moulton was a thief."

"Capital! Go on."

"He carried out his thefts of jewels somewhere in Spain, ran off with the loot, and hid himself with his half-brother, Bishop Lamson. His partner, done out of his share, patiently tracked him down, only to find that he had died - in his anger, he desecrated Moulton's stone. Then he began to search for the jewels. A pity Bishop Lamson had to suffer!"

"Spare your grief, Parker. His Lordship did not suffer. He died of pneumonia and lies under Moulton's stone by Moulton's design. Apart from that little detail, you have substantially accounted for what mystery there is. I take it that the Spaniard recognized Moulton in Lamson's guise when he called during the night and lost no time taking vengeance. I fancy the half-brothers were not so unlike in stature and general appearance as to arouse suspicion in anyone but one long close to Moulton.

"If Moulton, having assumed his half-brother's role - in which he could live on the Bishop's income, perhaps without the necessity of running up to London from time to time to sell a stone or two - had not been so greedy as to send Mrs. Parton a bill, we might never have had this sanguinary matter called to our attention. It was the curious coincidence of death in the Bishop's house, the Bishop's suddenly doing something out of character, and the desecration of the gravestone all together that suggested something more than senile deterioration. Now let us be off for London."

Three days later a note from Inspector Jamison sent around to our quarters confirmed all Pons's deductions. Pedro Ramirez had

been taken at Dover, a pouch of worthless glass in his possession, together with the murder weapon. He and George Moulton had been robbing churches in Spain until Moulton ran off with the loot.

"Taken from church and returned to church," chuckled Pons. "There is some equity in that. Give Jamison a ring, my dear fellow, and send him to St. Christopher's after the real jewels, where George Moulton hid them in plain sight while the vicar thought he was at his prayers. What better place to conceal church jewelry than in a church!"

The Adventure of the Ascot Scandal

MY FRIEND SOLAR PONS, raised his head suddenly from the cryptogram he was studying. "If I do not mistake the tenor of our good Mrs. Johnson's footsteps, she is coming up the stairs in a state of excitement."

"A car drove up a few moments ago," I said.

"I heard it," replied Pons, pushing back from the table to wait.

Our long-suffering landlady reached the threshold, knocked at first timidly, then more boldly and anxiously.

"Come in, come in, Mrs. Johnson," called Pons.

Mrs. Johnson opened the door and looked around it, her face flushed. "Oh, Mr. Pons, forgive me they have no appointment but it's Lord and Lady Gresham—dear me, it quite flusters me. They're waiting below."

"Show them up, by all means, Mrs. Johnson. The day thus far has been singularly devoid of challenge."

Mrs. Johnson backed out, closing the door after her.

"Lord and Lady Gresham," murmured Pons, reaching for the newspapers. "There was something in yesterday's papers about them." He searched quickly through the paper he had picked up, and came to a pause. "Ah, here we are. '*Scandal at Ascot Thief in Lord Gresham's Box*' A daring thief at Ascot yesterday entered Lord Gresham's box by means of a forged card and created a diversion in the course of which he escaped with Lady Gresham's valuable diamond brooch. . . ."

"And they are expecting you to catch him!" I cried. "Surely that is a matter for the police."

"Nothing is too trivial to lend it an ear at least," said Pons tranquilly. "But here they are."

Mrs. Johnson once again opened the door to our quarters and announced in a tremulous voice, "Lord and Lady Gresham."

It was rather Lady and Lord Gresham, however, for Lady Gresham made an aggressive entrance and his lordship followed along behind with the same air of meekness that a curate might wear in the wake of his Bishop.

Her ladyship was a sharp-featured, milk-skinned young woman

with strawberry coloured hair worn in a modified Gibson coiffure. Her black eyes fixed upon Pons at once, and without preamble, she declared, "Mr. Pons, I want my brooch back."

"Pray be seated," said Pons, moving a chair forward.

She immediately sat down on the very edge of the chair, perched and thrusting forward into the room as it were, as if in disdain or eagerness or perhaps both, while Lord Gresham came to stand immediately behind her—a thin, almost scrawny young man with straw-coloured hair and worried blue eyes. He wore a moustache on his upper lip, and a monocle in one eye, though this, it was evident within the first few minutes of his presence in our quarters, had an unfortunate habit of falling out, so that his lordship was constantly engaged, whether speaking or not, in alternately dabbing at his forehead with a silk handkerchief or replacing his monocle.

"I don't care what it costs," her ladyship went on, "but I want it back. Daddy gave it to me before I came across to marry Archie, and I'm sweet on it because it's a keepsake from Daddy."

"Ah, Lady Gresham is an American," said Pons.

"Yes, but that has nothing to do with what happened at Ascot," she said.

"Let us begin at the beginning," said Pons patiently.

Lady Gresham looked over her shoulder and up. "You tell him, Pet."

Lord Gresham immediately responded. "It is a matter of the utmost delicacy," he began, "and we must at all costs avoid a scandal."

Her ladyship interrupted with a jeering laugh. "Oh, fiddlededeel" she cried. "It's been in all the papers already."

"We shall want no more of it," said Lord Gresham firmly.

"And we shall want the brooch returned, no questions asked," said her ladyship just as firmly. "Go on, Pet, tell him everything."

"Very well, Dolly," said Lord Gresham. "It happened, as you know, at Ascot the day before yesterday—but, of course, Mr. Pons, you've read the accounts in the newspapers surely?"

"I take everything in the papers with a grain of salt, Lord Gresham," said Pons with the utmost gravity.

"Oh, I say, that's good, that is," said his lordship appreciatively. "That's good, isn't it, Dolly?"

"Yes, yes," she replied with mounting impatience. "But do tell him, Archie, everything just as it happened."

Lord Gresham began once more. "Her ladyship was in our box

with some friends Jack Luton and his wife, Alise, and Miss Grace Levinson, when this bounder came in, presenting a card giving him entry purportedly signed by me — a bounder, sir. . . .”

“Oh, I don’t know, Pet,” interrupted Lady Gresham. “He was at first very charming, very agreeable. And rather handsome, too. I did think that he wore rouge or something of that sort. But when he was so attentive to Grace, and then to Alise Luton, and then, naturally to me” — she simpered briefly — “why, of course, we felt that he was hardly the sort of gentleman you could have given entry to our box. It did occur to me,” she added, with a dark glance for her husband, “that you might be paying off some gaming debt or other — but you tell the story, Pet.”

His lordship sighed and made ready to begin again.

This time Pons interrupted him. “Your lordship was not present?”

“Not then, no, Mr. Pons. I was delayed and I didn’t reach our box until after it had happened.”

Pons turned to Lady Gresham. “Perhaps then you, who were there, could set forth a clearer picture of what actually took place.”

“Well, of course,” she said cheerfully. “I should have told it all along, I know. But it’s really Pet’s responsibility, he makes such a point of being head of the house and all. Well, this man came up to me and presented his card, and what else could I do but let him into our box? After all, I thought my husband would expect to see him there when he came.”

“Did the gentleman give his name?”

“A bounder!” put in Lord Gresham.

“Oh, yes, his name. Well, I think it was something like Evelyn Parkinson written on his lapel ticket — yes, that’s it. But he didn’t offer any explanation of how he came to have his lordship’s card, and of course I couldn’t very well ask, after all, he was a guest, and all that, and I thought, naturally, Archie would explain when he came. Well, to make a long story short, he had brought a flask of liquor with him, and he took a nip now and then, and I guess he got a little tight, and the first thing we knew he had insulted Alise and made some further remarks about Jack, and he and Jack got to scuffling. Naturally, we ladies tried to separate the two, and you know, as I said, that man had been drinking, and he was hard to handle. Jack got in one punch — nothing serious, but that man couldn’t hit anything, he was just all over us, but at last we separated them and I said, ‘I must ask you to leave this box!’ and he went. It wasn’t long after that I missed my brooch.”

Having finished her story, she settled back a little in her chair more at ease.

"You did, of course, search your box?" asked Pons.

"Oh, yes, we did that," she answered, somewhat impatiently, as if Pons need not have asked. "But there was nothing there. We even looked around outside of it. The brooch was gone. Oh, you needn't doubt it, Mr. Pons—it went with that man. And I want it back because Daddy gave it to me, and Daddy paid twenty-five thousand dollars for it at Tiffany's just before I left New York."

"What happened to the card he presented?"

"The card? Why, he put it back into the pocket of his weskit."

"I see. Now, Lady Gresham, you had every opportunity to examine your visitor?"

"Oh, I surely did. I naturally want to know who my husband associates with. Of course, I couldn't ask, you know—that wouldn't have been nice. But I looked him up and down, as you might say."

"Ah, then, you can describe him?"

"Yes, Mr. Pons. He was a young man. He had a very good figure and he wore his clothes so well it came as a surprise to me to discover he wasn't a gentleman, after all. He did appear to have rouge and perhaps powder on his face and I wouldn't be surprised to learn his hair wasn't—well, wasn't *all* his—because it was much darker than his eyebrows. He had brown eyes with very long lashes—I suppose *some* ladies would call him very handsome, but of course I always like to look farther than skin-deep. His mouth was just a trifle petulant and he had what we call in America 'cupid's bow' lips. He had a straight nose, a little longer than most, but not too long to unbalance his face. His fingers were slender—just the sort you might think right for an artist—or a thief. And one more thing, I can't be positive, but once in a while I could have sworn he talked like an American."

"Would you call him experienced?"

"Oh, yes, he certainly was that. He knew just what he was doing. He did it very well. He had come to that box to steal and he managed it."

"Was anything else of value missing?"

"No, Mr. Pons. We took inventory right away. Alise had a brooch on, too, that cost somewhat less than mine. He took the most expensive piece."

"You have circulated its description through the police, of course?"

"Well, no. Archie didn't want any more publicity, and that's why

we came here. I said, 'It's either the police or some private inquiry agent.' I wanted to go see Sherlock Holmes—we've read so much about him over there—but Archie told me he'd retired to some place in the country to keep bees—so we came to you. If we can't have the best, we'll have to do with second-best."

Behind her, Lord Gresham reddened. I suppressed a smile, but I saw that Pons's eyes were dancing at her ladyship's gaffe.

"But I have the description right here, Mr. Pons," she went on, producing a piece of paper which she unfolded as she spoke. "I even made a drawing of it for you, life-size." She handed the paper to Pons. "There's a large, flawless diamond in the centre of the design—ten carats—then a circle of emeralds—then a circle of smaller diamonds, and there's an emerald pendant from the centre. It's all set in platinum, and Daddy had it made specially for me."

While Pons studied Lady Gresham's drawing, his lordship began to speak apologetically.

"I did tell Dolly that a discreet inquiry would be better, but that it was hardly an important enough problem for your talents, Mr. Pons. I know it would mean a good bit of purely routine inquiry."

"Oh, fiddlededee!" cried her ladyship. "Mr. Pons will be paid."

"Nothing is too trivial for my talents," said Pons with unexpected modesty. "And it would be a pleasure to return her ladyship's brooch."

Lady Gresham almost squealed her delight. "Now, that's what I always mean when I tell Pet that the Englishmen have it over the Americans—they're such *gentlemen!*"

Pons bowed, his eyes twinkling.

Lady Gresham thereupon became very business-like. She took her handbag from the floor where she had placed it, opened it, and removed her cheque book. Without more ado, she wrote a cheque to Pons and handed it to him.

"I understand you will want something on account, Mr. Pons. I hope a hundred pounds will do."

"Amply, your ladyship," said Pons.

Lady Gresham bounced to her feet. "We can go now, Pet. Mr. Pons will take care of it. And you needn't worry—I can tell he'll be delicate and tactful enough."

They bade us good-morning and walked out the door I held open for them.

"I wonder," said Pons reflectively, when I turned to him, "if all young American ladies are like that."

"You can take it from me that she married a title and he married some money," I said.

"I submit it isn't quite like that, Parker," said Pons, smiling.

"But this is surely a prosaic problem for your talents," I said.

"Is it not!" he agreed almost with enthusiasm. "Yet I think it has one or two little points of interest."

"I should like to know what they are. It seems to me a very ordinary case of theft—oh, smoothly done, perhaps, yes, but on the whole ordinary."

"Gently, Parker. We have here a most uncommon thief—and a most selective one. Was Lady Gresham's brooch famous? Perhaps it ought to have been, but I have certainly not heard of it before the account of its theft in the newspapers. Yet the thief seems to have been aware of its existence and of its worth; indeed, he seems to have gone to some daring lengths to appropriate it; he could hardly have chosen a more public place than a box at the races. He seems not to have been daunted by this. Did you think it of any significance that her ladyship detected something American about him?"

"Of course," I cried. "The brooch was specially made in America. Someone there certainly knew of it. Perhaps an ex-employee of Tiffany's?"

"I should think it highly unlikely that so respectable and well-established a firm as Tiffany's would risk retaining an employee about whose references or character there could be even the shadow of a doubt."

"Then an ex-employee of her father's."

"Would she not have recognized him, in that case? I should think so."

"He was made up to conceal his identity from her. Her ladyship remarked on his rouge and guessed that his hair was not his own. He wore a wig."

"A wig would hardly conceal the identity of an old employee," said Pons. "Furthermore, Lady Gresham described him as young. But it is idle to speculate. We have certain facts. He was a young man. He was probably of American origin. He was aware of the existence of the brooch. He was evidently also aware that Lady Gresham would be wearing it at Ascot though he could quite possibly have been waiting on the opportunity of her doing so. He was prepared to present himself boldly at Lord Gresham's box and pose as a friend of his lordship. Do these circumstances suggest anything to you?"

"We are dealing with a highly resourceful scoundrel."

"Elementary. Nothing more?"

"Nothing, except that you are certainly not going to have an easy time finding him."

"Oh, I am a little less discouraged than you seem to be, Parker," Pons said jovially. "In fact, I almost have my hand on him."

"You are joking!"

"Far from it. It is not so much the thief as the whereabouts of the brooch that puzzles me. I already know enough about the thief, thanks to her ladyship's excellent description, to apprehend him in but the time it will take me to make inquiries. The brooch offers considerably more of a problem."

"It will surely have been disposed of by this time."

"Ah, do you think so? It does not seem to you that a brooch of such distinction might be difficult to market in any fashion, short of cutting it up and disposing of it piecemeal? Flawless ten-carat diamonds cannot be so plentiful that the appearance of one would not excite comment. A diamond of such size would surely command between three thousand five hundred and four thousand pounds. Presuming the lesser diamonds to be, let us say, but a tenth of a carat, we can estimate another ten pounds each for them. The possibility is distinct that her ladyship underestimates its actual value."

"Pawned, then."

"It would surely have occurred to even the most amateur among thieves that the pawnshops would be under police surveillance from the moment the theft was reported."

"But Lord Gresham has not called in the police," I protested.

"The thief could hardly hope for as much," Pons pointed out. "But the police need not be 'called in' to take a hand. Crime does not occur simply at the decision of the victims."

"Could it not then be smuggled into Holland for disposal?"

"There is always that possibility, but any thief might expect police on both sides to be watching for it."

"Very well then. What avenues remain open for your search?"

"I fancy we shall have to have a word with the thief himself. Just hand me that directory, Parker."

"Oh, you expect to find his name and address!" I said, not without sarcasm.

Pons merely smiled. He went through the directory until he found the reference he sought. "Ah, here we are. The Actors' Guild

Agency in Great Queen Street. Since that is the best-known actors' agency in London, it is certainly there that we should make our initial application."

"An actors' agency!" I cried. "Pons, are you out of your mind?"

"Surely it must have occurred to you that anyone who could carry off so daring a theft as that at our client's box at Ascot must be a consummate actor—perhaps an actor in need."

"And a thief!" I added.

Pons chuckled.

"What I am looking for," said Pons to the gentleman at the agency, "is an American-born actor with a reasonably wide range of talents in small parts. He should not be too obviously American, but should not have entirely lost his American accent."

"We have two, sir, on the waiting list at present. One is George Riddell. The other is Harold Pollard."

"I should prefer a young man, not over thirty."

"That will be Mr. Pollard. He is just thirty, sir."

"Straight nose, on the long side?"

"Yes, sir."

"Cupid's-bow lips?"

"I believe you would call them that."

"Brown eyes?"

"Yes, sir. That will certainly fit Mr. Pollard."

"Where can I find him?"

"We will send him where you like."

"No, that will not be necessary. If you will be so good as to give me his address, we will just go round to his quarters and interview him there."

He gave us a Drury Lane address, and Pons thanked him.

Since Drury Lane was just around the corner from the agency, it was within easy walking distance, and in a few minutes we were out in the street and on our way. I could not help expostulating a little.

"This is surely no more than coincidence," I said.

"But how precise in every detail!" replied Pons, smiling. "You do my poor powers no honour, Parker."

More than this he would not say. Instead, as we went along, he spoke of the history of Great Queen Street and its residences. "Boswell lived here, and Sheridan," he said, "and Sir Godfrey Kneller and 'Perdita' Robinson. Perhaps Mr. Pollard seeks to bask in their reflected glory from a respectful distance."

I could do as well, and reminded him that Pollard's quarters in Drury Lane were, for any actor, of greater significance, for the association of that thoroughfare with Nell Gwyn, Garrick, John Kemble, Mrs. Siddons, Edmund Kean, and many others.

"*Touché!*" cried Pons imperturbably.

We arrived in silence at the address we sought.

"At this hour of the afternoon Mr. Pollard ought to be at home," said Pons, as he rang the bell.

The landlady who came to answer his ring might have been a pale, somewhat thinner copy of our Mrs. Johnson.

"Mr. Harold Pollard?" asked Pons. "Is he in?"

"Yes, sir. First floor, first door to the right."

Pons thanked her as she stood aside to permit our entry.

We climbed the stairs and Pons rapped smartly on the first door.

A pair of stockinged feet struck the floor beyond the door, as though our quarry had been lying on a bed or sitting with his feet raised; in a moment the door was pulled open and a not unhandy young man stood there.

"What can I do for you?" he asked.

"Mr. Harold Pollard? Unemployed actor?"

"That's me."

"My name is Solar Pons, Mr. Pollard. I am acting for Lord Gresham in the matter of her ladyship's brooch. I have come for it."

Pollard's jaw dropped, but only for a moment. Then he grinned. "Well, you're a cool one, I must say. Come in."

He backed away from the door, leaving it open, vaulted over a chair and, as we closed the door behind us, spun around to a small dressing-table and pulled open a drawer. From it he took a glittering object and handed it carelessly to Pons. A glance was sufficient to assure me that it was indeed Lady Gresham's diamond brooch.

"He's a fancy one— hiring Mr. Solar Pons, the Great Detective," said Pollard with the utmost *savoir faire*.

"Actually, her ladyship retained me," said Pons. "The police simply wouldn't do. 'No questions asked.' The police like to ask questions."

"And you don't!" said Pollard, his grin widening. "So I won't ask you any."

"Gentleman's agreement," said Pons.

"Right-o!"

"Good-day, Mr. Pollard. A pity one of your talents should have to resort to such ventures!"

"There are some people have it good, and some haven't," said Pollard, closing the door behind us.

"You don't mean to let him escape scot-free?" I asked hotly.

"'No questions asked,' our client said — and so it shall be. I am not the agent of justice," replied Pons.

"It is unlike you," I said.

"Ah, Parker, you are quicker to judge than I," said Pons. "Now I fancy we shall have a word or two with the noble lord. I shall just send him a wire asking him to step around to 7B this evening."

Pons spent an hour after our evening meal studying the workmanship of Lady Gresham's diamond brooch before he laid it away under the deerstalker on the mantel and returned to the cryptographic study which the arrival of our clients had interrupted that morning.

I could not keep from saying, "You have not done any more than any constable could have done. I'm surprised you accepted the problem."

"And disappointed?"

"I admit it."

"Ah, I was just in the mood for a less sanguinary diversion," replied Pons. "What with that little matter of the Bishop's Companion only last week, I have had enough of gore. Tomorrow, who can say, perhaps we shall once again have murder on our hands. Today's theft is an interim engagement."

I took refuge in silence.

Promptly at eight o'clock, the hour appointed, Lord Gresham presented himself.

"I hope you have news for me, Mr. Pons," he said, as he took the chair Pons proffered.

"I may say that I have. I must, however, be certain of one or two little points."

"By all means, sir."

"Her ladyship's brooch was insured?"

"Heavily."

"Have you made any attempt to collect that insurance, your lordship?"

"Not yet. I hope we may not find it necessary."

"And I. I have some scruples about conniving, even indirectly, in an insurance swindle."

"What do you mean, Mr. Pons?"

Pons crossed to the mantel and raised the deerstalker. He picked up the brooch, carried it over, and laid it on the table before our client. His lordship goggled at it as if he could not believe his eyes.

He found his voice before Pons's silence. "Where—where in God's name did you find it, Mr. Pons?"

"I got it from Mr. Harold Pollard."

"Mr. Pollard?" his lordship echoed faintly.

"Mr. Pollard is the gentleman who invaded your box at Ascot and took the brooch from Lady Gresham."

"Mr. Pons, I hardly know what to say."

"Perhaps, in the circumstances, you ought to say nothing, your lordship. You have my sympathy. How much, in fact, did you raise on her ladyship's brooch before you found it necessary to substitute this creation in paste and glass?"

Lord Gresham gulped and his monocle fell from his eye. He pulled the inevitable silk handkerchief from his pocket and mopped his brow.

"How much?" asked Pons inexorably.

"Two thousand pounds."

"Can you redeem it?"

His lordship shook his head. He looked the picture of abject misery.

"Can her ladyship?"

"Easily. But she holds her wealth tight, Mr. Pons, very tight."

Pons's lips trembled, but he did not give way to laughter. "Lady Gresham specified 'no questions asked.' Pray give her my compliments and tell her that her brooch is at ——" He paused inquiringly.

"Chaim Kundrat's. He's a private money-lender. He's helped me before when I was short."

"And that she can reclaim it there, no questions asked, for the sum of two thousand pounds. As for your lordship—I can only suggest that you take more care of your gaming ventures in the future. Inform her ladyship that the retainer already paid covers my entire fee."

A wildly hopeful light came into being in his lordship's pale eyes. "It might just work, Mr. Pons."

"It will have to do. Her ladyship will stop at nothing to regain possession of her brooch. You will have to make that two thousand up to her in another way."

"Mr. Pons, I cannot thank you enough!" cried Lord Gresham, bounding to his feet.

"Pray do not try. These little domestic difficulties are bound to occur in even the best-regulated households. You see, I am content to remain a bachelor."

Lord Gresham shook Pons's hand vigorously and would have taken his leave, had not Pons stopped him.

"You have forgotten your imitation brooch, your lordship," he said, handing it to him. "You may need it again."

"True, true," said his lordship, pocketing the brooch.

"But do not make the mistake of going home with it in your pocket. Lady Gresham strikes me as likely to find it without effort."

Lord Gresham favoured us with a wan smile and departed.

Pons fell into his favourite chair, shaking with laughter.

"Ah, Parker, the joys of wedded bliss!" he cried, when his laughter had subsided.

"You are being unfair to the state of matrimony," I cried.

"Of course. I should have narrowed my reference to those who marry for other reasons than love."

"Pons, you guessed from the beginning."

"Say, rather, I knew. Lady Gresham as much as told us. She identified the thief as an actor, however unwittingly. Actors are for hire for a great variety of occasions, and when she said to her husband that it had occurred to her that he might 'be paying off some gaming debt or other' the solution immediately suggested itself. Lord Gresham, unable to get his hands on some of the money for which he had married that red-headed charmer, had in desperation taken her valuable brooch and borrowed money against it. He had prepared an imitation but he had not counted on his wife's wearing the brooch, since presumably she set such store by it that she seldom wore it. When she began to wear it again, he had no alternative but to prevent her discovery that she was wearing an imitation, since he could not raise the money to redeem it, so he arranged for Pollard to steal it, giving him his ticket and card to gain him entry to his box at Ascot—a card Pollard naturally pocketed again, after having shown it, for any comparison with Lord Gresham's signature would have proven that they were identical and that no forgery was in fact involved. Lord Gresham

might conceivably avoid having to redeem the brooch at all, or might redeem it only to sell it, if the gambit succeeded. But, alas! he had not counted on his wife's devotion to that keepsake from her father. He was able to put her off the police — it would never do to have them institute a search for it in view of the circumstances — but was unable to prevent her coming here." He sighed contentedly. "Ah, Parker, the single state favours my constitution."

"Say, rather, few women could bear to share it," I said.

"Your powers of deduction are truly remarkable, my dear fellow," replied Pons with a little chuckle of self-congratulation.

The Adventure of the "Triple Kent"

IF SOLAR PONS had not visited Sussex that summer of 1932, it is very probable that the singularly sanguine affair of the triple murder in Kent—filed among my notes under the unimaginative heading of the "Triple Kent"—might not have come his way, and I would have been deprived of a notable example of that fascinating power of ratiocination which was indisputably his.

We were on the way back from the South Downs, where Pons had paid an almost reverential visit to an old bee-keeper whose retirement concealed the identity of a brilliant genius to whom Pons habitually referred as "the Master," when the train drew to a stop at Tunbridge Wells Central. Pons had been slumped in his seat in our compartment, his head on his chest, his arms folded, and his lean, ascetic face in repose, when suddenly his eyes flashed open, he raised his head, and became instantly alert.

"There is some disturbance ahead, Parker," he said. "What can it be?"

At the same moment, I was aware of the commotion.

"Ah, someone is going from compartment to compartment, opening and shutting the doors," said Pons.

"Looking for someone?"

"That is all too likely," agreed Pons.

So saying, he lowered the window and stuck his head out. Almost immediately, he drew back again, his eyes twinkling.

"I know you're in haste for London, Parker, but I fear we shall not be on this train. Did not Mrs. Johnson know our destination?"

"Indeed, she did. I never leave without telling her where you can be reached."

"I fancy I am about to be reached."

As he spoke, the door of our compartment was opened. A white-moustached man of middle age with a military bearing stood there. At sight of Pons, he gave a glad cry of relief.

"Mr. Pons! At last! Thank heaven you weren't on the earlier train, or I'd have missed you."

"Dr. Parker, meet C.I.D. Superintendent Lester of Scotland Yard. Will you come in?"

"Mr. Pons, I cannot. I implore you instead to step out. There has been a terrible crime in the vicinity and I am at my wits' end for some clue by means of which to fathom it. I telephoned you earlier. Your landlady was kind enough to tell me you had gone on holiday in Sussex, and to give me an address where you might be reached. I telephoned there only to learn that you had gone. I hoped you might be on this train, and I have not been disappointed."

My companion looked to me. "What do you say, Parker? Can your practise spare you for another day?"

"My *locum tenens* will manage very well without me," I said.

"Capitall" exclaimed Pons.

Forthwith he came to his feet, snatched his small bag, and stepped from the train. I followed.

"I have a car waiting, Mr. Pons," said Superintendent Lester. "I have only just now left the scene of the crime, and we're waiting on my finding you to move the bodies."

"Bodies?" repeated Pons.

"Bodies, Mr. Pons," said the Superintendent again, with the utmost gravity. "Three of them. Three harmless ladies murdered. They are at their cottage, which is not far from Tunbridge Wells. But here is our car. After you, Mr. Pons."

"Now, then," said Pons, when we were moving off. The driver turned down Vale Road and up past the Swan Hotel and The Pantiles and on to the Hastings Road. At Frant he turned left on the Hastings fork and just before Wadhurst entered a narrow lane. "Let us have a brief résumé of the affair," continued Pons. "There is no doubt it is murder, I take it?"

"None whatever, Mr. Pons. The three ladies were found shot to death. We haven't discovered either the weapon or the cartridges. A shotgun was used."

Pons listened without interruption, sitting with his eyes closed, one arm folded across his chest, the other resting on it and held aloft, with his fingers gently stroking one earlobe.

"The victims are Mrs. Edith Norwood, who was forty-five; her daughter, Louise, who was twenty-three; and her housekeeper, Miss Elizabeth Sothern, who was fifty two. Mrs. Norwood owned the house. She and her daughter were found in their sitting-room; Miss Sothern was some distance from the house, in a little coppice. All three ladies had been shot in the back at quite close range.

"The most curious part of the problem," concluded Superintendent Lester, "is the complete absence of motive."

"Say, rather, obvious motive," said Pons. "What is obscure today may not be so tomorrow."

"As far as can be determined," said Superintendent Lester then, "nothing has been removed from the cottage. There is, in fact, not the slightest sign of any disturbance, apart, of course, from the havoc caused when one of the poor ladies fell against a tea-table and knocked it over; as a result, there is an upset table, and broken crockery is scattered on the floor. The ladies were evidently at tea."

"And Mr. Norwood?" asked Pons.

"Mr. John Norwood was in London. He has been notified and is on his way here. The bodies were discovered by a postman three hours ago. I should tell you, however, that these three ladies were the sole occupants of the cottage. Mr. and Mrs. Norwood had been divorced five years ago. Since then, Mr. Norwood has remarried, and he and his second wife live in a house in Crowborough. He was a frequent visitor at the home of his first wife, and so on occasion was his second wife. They were all on the friendliest of terms, and apparently had been old friends before the divorce and remarriage of Mr. Norwood. He seemed very much distressed at hearing this sad and shocking news and volunteered to come immediately.

"The late Mrs. Norwood and her daughter lived on a competence afforded them by her ex-husband. Another daughter of the couple, who will inherit the cottage and all else left by her mother and sister, is married and lives in the United States. Her inheritance now also includes the competence from her father, and she remains his only child, since no children were born to him by his second wife. No one within reach thus stands to gain by the death of Mrs. Edith Norwood and her daughter."

"You have eliminated robbery and gain," mused Pons. "What remains?"

"Mr. Pons, I do not know. The ladies lived very quietly. Except for Miss Norwood, who went to London occasionally, they went nowhere save very rarely to Crowborough to spend an afternoon or an evening with Mr. and Mrs. Norwood there. Apart from the reciprocation of these visits, there was little social life at the cottage. The ladies were much given to reading, listening to the wireless, and playing cards. They were highly respected, regularly attended church services, and contributed to every charity. They had no known enemies."

"But one unknown," murmured Pons.

"The house is just ahead here," continued the Superintendent.

"As you see, it lies over a knoll in a little valley, which explains the fact that no one heard the shots."

"The police surgeon has examined the bodies to determine the time of death?"

"Yes, Mr. Pons. The ladies were shot some time yesterday afternoon."

He finished speaking as the car drove up to a gate which opened on to a well-kept lawn. A constable stood on guard there. Another was stationed at the door of the house. A few people had collected curiously in the road outside, but, since nothing of the crime was visible from that point, they shifted uneasily and moved restlessly to and fro, unable to get past the constable.

"No one has been in but the doctor and myself," explained Lester. "In the circumstances, it was thought best to disturb absolutely nothing so that any assistance you might be able to extend to us would not be hampered."

"Commendable," said Pons, but already his keen eyes were darting here and there, looking past a group of fruit trees to the only visible coppice nearby, doubtless the scene of Miss Sothern's death.

The path leading to the house was of crushed gravel, and carried no footprints. The house itself was a modest cottage, snug behind laburnum bushes, and approached by a nave of yew and box-elder trees. Some roses blossomed beside the door, of a colour which was no less bright than that which had burst forth inside, and was now darkened by the intervening hours.

For the scene inside was shocking, indeed. Two comely women — one in her prime, the other at the height of her beauty and youth — lay still in death. One was almost at the threshold, with the appearance of having crumpled against the door-frame before striking the floor; this was the younger. The other had knocked over the tea-table and lay in the midst of crockery, spilled tea, and scones. Both lay in dark pools of blood, which had flowed from gaping wounds in their backs.

Pons picked his way delicately to stand beside the body of the older woman. He crouched over her for a few moments, his sharp eyes scanning the floor, flickering from object to object. Then he walked over to the body of Miss Norwood, stepped around her, and vanished into the adjoining room.

He reappeared in a short time.

"I take it the coppice and Miss Sothern's body are easy of access

from the outer door leading off the kitchen?" he asked the Superintendent.

"Yes, Mr. Pons."

"Let us leave Miss Sothern for the moment," said Pons, returning to Mrs. Norwood's body. "Is there not something singularly suggestive about this scene?"

The Superintendent looked his perplexity at Pons.

"Let us ask rather," said Pons, "what the scene suggests to you?"

"Obviously, the ladies were having tea," answered Lester.

"Say, rather, about to have tea. If you will look closely at the broken cups, you will find that none had as yet held tea. But there is even more to be seen in these shards. Are there not four cups? I fancy if you piece them together, you will discover four, not two or three. Two would account for Mrs. Norwood and her daughter. A third possibly for Miss Sothern."

"They were very informal people," put in Superintendent Lester. "They would certainly not exclude the housekeeper for tea."

"Very well, then. I submit they were expecting a visitor to tea."

"Would not their visitor have found them thus and reported their murder to us?" asked Superintendent Lester.

"I should be inclined to doubt it very much, in these circumstances," said Pons dryly, "because it is fairly certain that their visitor was their murderer. Moreover, I submit that the murderer's primary objective was the death of Mrs. Norwood; Miss Louise Norwood and Miss Sothern were killed because they could reveal the identity of their visitor."

Superintendent Lester stood for a moment in deep thought. "I fail to follow you in that, Mr. Pons," he said presently.

"It is elementary, my dear fellow. Consider—the presence of four cups on the table indicates that a visitor was expected. The presence of the tea itself suggests that the approach of their expected visitor had been observed, and tea had been brought in. The fact that it had not been poured is sufficient to enable us to postulate that their visitor had only just arrived. Mrs. Norwood was surely on a basis of casual and friendly relations with her murderer. She was almost certainly about to pour tea when she was shot from behind. Miss Norwood was very probably a witness to her mother's death; as she turned to flee, she, too, was shot. The housekeeper, perhaps having come far enough to discover what had taken place, turned and ran, pursued by the murderer, who shot her in the coppice. The primary object of the murderer's attention was, then,

Mrs. Norwood. The other ladies were shot only because they witnessed the first murder. A singularly callous and brutal crime. But, tell me, Lester - it suggests nothing to you that in these circumstances a place had been laid for Miss Sothern?"

"No, sir, except that the Norwood ladies were not departing from their custom of having their housekeeper to take tea with them."

Pons smiled enigmatically. "Pray consider it, while I look about outside."

So saying, he was off, pushing through the kitchen. Lester turned and went out the way he had come in. I followed. From the front of the house we could see Pons moving toward the body which lay as it had fallen among the trees of the coppice. Once there, however, he dropped to his knees and proceeded to make the closest possible scrutiny of the grassy ground, crawling back part of the way he had come.

When he had finished, he rose and went around the house, vanishing from sight. He next appeared around the corner of the cottage nearest us. There once again he dropped to his knees beneath a window which opened from the room in which the dead ladies lay. Lester watched him in absorbed silence, until at last Pons rose, brushed grass blades from his knees, and came toward us.

"Miss Sothern's footprints are quite clear," he said. "She ran from the cottage. Her flight was erratic. She was evidently so shocked and frightened that she ran without direction and only turned toward the coppice when she saw that she was being pursued. Her pursuer, however, caught and killed her."

"We found no trace of his footprints, Mr. Pons," said the Superintendent.

"There is indisputable evidence of the pursuit of Miss Sothern," said Pons. "I commend a closer examination of the turf to you. Manifestly, Miss Sothern was not shot at as close range as her employer and the young lady: but her wound was no less mortal. The murderer then apparently gathered up such cartridges as were ejected and quietly made off."

As Pons spoke, the constable at the gate came up the path and bent to whisper to the Superintendent.

"Let him come in," said the latter. Turning to Pons, he explained, "Mr. Norwood has arrived."

A patently agitated man of approximately fifty years of age came hurriedly up the path at the constable's direction. He was broad-shouldered. His eyes were a light blue, his mouth was sensuous, and

his pale cheeks were very full. He was well dressed, wore a dark moustache, and carried gloves with a walking-stick.

"My God! My God! Superintendent, where are they? Who has done this dreadful thing?" he cried, as he came up.

"Pull yourself together, Mr. Norwood. Your daughter and Mrs. Norwood are just inside. Miss Sothern is in the wood. Perhaps you had better not go in, sir."

But Norwood had already pushed past and into the cottage, from which presently came a heartrending cry of anguish. In a few moments Norwood came unsteadily out, visibly shaken. His face was ghastly. He sat down heavily on the stoop before the door, dropping gloves and stick, and covered his face with his hands, fighting for control.

Lester, however, gave him but a few moments of respite. Then he moved grimly closer.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Norwood, but we must ask you a few questions."

Norwood looked up haggardly. "I understand," he said quietly.

"Do you know of any enemy of Mrs. Norwood's who might have done this thing?" asked the Superintendent.

"No, sir. None of them had an enemy in the world. They were gentle and kind. You know that, Superintendent."

"Yes, Mr. Norwood," replied Lester. He would have gone on, had not Pons indicated that he wished to question Norwood. The Superintendent stepped back.

"Tell me, Mr. Norwood," said Pons, "was your ex-wife in the habit of allowing Miss Sothern to set a place for herself at tea?"

"At all meals, sir," said Norwood. "Except, of course, in case of special guests. At such times, Miss Sothern served. Otherwise everything was always very informal. It was a family tradition."

"You have another daughter."

"I spoke with her by transatlantic telephone before I came down," answered Norwood. "She and her husband live in Baltimore."

"Does Mrs. Norwood have any other surviving relatives?"

"A sister, Mrs. Sybel West, lives in Brisbane, Australia."

"Your ex-wife's sole heir is your other daughter?"

"Yes, sir."

"We understand that you and the present Mrs. Norwood occasionally visited here?"

"Yes, sir. Sometimes I stopped myself on my way up to or down from London, where I have my office. Sometimes, on a Sunday, Iris and I came together to spend the afternoon here. You should

understand, sir, that my present wife and my first wife were friends before my estrangement and divorce. We were next-door neighbours at Twickenham. After my divorce, I married Iris, who was the widow of a Colonial official."

"When did you last visit here, Mr. Norwood?"

"I spent a day here within the last week — just five days ago, sir."

"Alone?"

"My wife was indisposed. She knew I had been invited to visit Louise and Edith, of course."

"Who else commonly visited here, to your knowledge?"

"I know of no one." At this point a note of caution entered his voice. "Of course, you must realize that Edith and my daughter lived their own lives. Who came here between my own visits I have no way of knowing. But I should be inclined to think that they entertained no one regularly, or I should very probably have heard."

"Mrs. Norwood would have told you?"

"Yes, Edith would have mentioned it, I feel sure."

"Your first wife lived on a competence you paid her. How is this now affected by her death?"

"Not appreciably, sir. It continues, though in reduced form, and goes to our daughter in America."

Pons appeared to be briefly lost in thought, noticing which, Superintendent Lester excused himself and went back around the cottage toward the coppice, signaling to one of the constables on guard.

"The present Mrs. Norwood," resumed Pons, "is a small, fair woman?"

"Yes, Mr. Pons. She was a dancer and actress before her first marriage."

"In England?"

"In the provinces particularly. She was first married in Calcutta. Though how you could know of her is beyond me."

"The first Mrs. Norwood suggests the contrast. Second marriages are often made to very different types," said Pons with unusual glibness.

Norwood, however, was quite satisfied. He came to his feet just as the Superintendent returned.

"I'm afraid, Pons, your vision is better than mine," he said. "There are none but the woman's prints in the turf between the house and the wood."

"I hardly think your vision is at fault, Superintendent," said Pons. He took out his watch. "Mr. Norwood appears quite shaken, and, since Crowborough is not very far away, do you think it possible for us to accompany him to his home?"

The Superintendent was somewhat taken aback, but, despite Norwood's immediate protestations, he rallied to Pons's suggestion.

"I must give instructions to Mr. Denton for the removal of the bodies," he said. "Then we will set off." As he spoke an ambulance was already arriving at the gate, followed shortly by a car containing uniformed and plain-clothes officers.

In a short time we were on our way, driving back in the direction of Tunbridge Wells, and then turning left on a minor road which led down a steep and twisting hill lined with the rich woodland and thickly growing bracken of the Common. Then the car was traveling uphill, across the railway line and on past the High Rocks en route to Groombridge. The day was ideal, the summer sun shone upon the smiling landscape and a light wind blew, bringing with it the agreeable aroma of cut grass. Now and then, out of the forest areas, rose picturesque rocks, and at last the towers of Eridge Castle. Crowborough was indeed not far away.

"This was Jefferies country, if I'm not mistaken," I said.

"Yes, Richard Jefferies had the Downs Cottage," answered Norwood.

"There is also a certain literary doctor living near Crowborough," said Pons, with a twinkle in his eye. "In more than one way a colleague of yours, eh, Parker?"

I did not reply, for at that moment Norwood leaned forward to direct our driver, and in but a very little while we drew up before a pleasantly situated cottage on the outskirts of Crowborough.

"This is the Brown House," said Norwood. "I thank you for bringing me home."

He got out and would have shut the car door, had not Pons intervened. "I have a fancy to look about, if you do not mind, Mr. Norwood."

"But of course not, Mr. Pons. Do come in. Perhaps Mrs. Norwood could brew a cup of tea for us?"

"There will hardly be time, Mr. Norwood," said Pons, getting out of the car. "Do Mrs. Norwood and you live here alone?"

"No, sir. We have a housekeeper, Mrs. Mayfield, and her son, Fred. My wife retained them when we took the house."

Pons turned to Superintendent Lester. "Perhaps we had better let

Mr. Norwood go in before us. His news will grievously upset his wife, and these little scenes are scarcely to my liking. Come, let us walk about a bit."

"Just as you like, gentlemen," said Norwood.

Pons's consideration was futile, as it happened, for even as we were turning away, a slender woman came running from the house toward Norwood. She was a pretty, sweet-faced woman in her forties, and she had obviously been weeping. Oblivious of us, she threw herself into her husband's arms.

"Oh, John, John—I heard it on the wireless. How terrible!"

"Yes, my dear. But, please—we have visitors."

We were formally introduced. Mrs. Norwood held back her emotions with effort, and clung rather pathetically to her husband. He was plainly needed at home, for the triple murder had shocked her profoundly.

Pons, however, was not to be diverted from his purpose. He had meant to walk around the property and now, excusing himself, he set out. Superintendent Lester elected to remain with Mr. and Mrs. Norwood as they walked toward the house, from one window of which a short, slender, thin-faced elderly woman stood watching us.

There was a row of sheds along one line of Norwood's property, and it was toward them that Pons bent his steps. The door to one of them stood open, and the figure of a man could be seen moving about inside. It was to this shed that Pons went.

The man inside observed our approach and came to the door. He was a dark faced fellow, with high cheekbones and a small mouth, and his brown eyes watched us suspiciously.

"I take it you're Mayfield," said Pons, coming up.

"That's right," he answered, crisply.

"Mr. Norwood has given us permission to look around a bit," Pons went on "I see you've a fine array of tools here."

"Mr. Norwood's."

"Is all this then Mr. Norwood's? I should think he scarcely had time to work at the bench here, or to fish, or shoot."

"Oh, the fishing gear and the guns are mine," said Mayfield. "He don't have time, no, that he don't. He do sometimes get down here by noon or thereabouts from the City. But he don't often take out a gun and never a fishing rod."

"And Mrs. Norwood?"

Mayfield grinned. "She's afraid of fish. Can't look a fish in the eye, or a worm, either. And as for shooting—hoh! Whv, the other

day, she says, 'Teach me how to shoot that gun there, Fred' that's the shotgun," he explained, obviously with a poor opinion of our knowledge of weapons "and she took it out and practised, but she couldn't hit much with it, not as I'm saying she couldn't if she tried a lot — and yesterday she went out with twelve cartridges and came back with the gun unused. Got so scared, she did, she just threw the ammunition away and brought the gun back."

"It looks a fine gun."

"That it is, sir. Just feel how light it is."

He lifted the gun out of the rack and tossed it to Pons, who caught it deftly. Pons held it close to his face.

"But this gun has been fired recently, and not cleaned," said Pons. "The smell of powder is still strong."

"Could be Ma had it. She's a crack shot, she is."

Pons handed the gun back to him and stood looking idly around. Then he asked, "Does not Mrs. Norwood own a car?"

"Yes, sir, that she does. Mrs. Norwood took it in to Crowborough yesterday at midday for repairs. It's still there." He probed in the pocket of his waistcoat. "I expect I ought to go in after it; they've had it long enough." He drew a docket from his pocket. "Should have had plenty of time, I expect. Mrs. Norwood waited in Crowborough for it, but it took longer than they thought, and she came back on foot just before he came down from London."

"Thank you, Mayfield. If you'll excuse us, we'll join Mr. and Mrs. Norwood."

Pons walked toward the house in deep and troubled silence.

"You suspect someone, Pons," I said.

He shook his head. "No, Parker, I have long passed beyond suspicion. I know who killed those unfortunate ladies."

"Indeed! I suppose you've seen something Superintendent Lester couldn't see."

"No, no, the very nature of the crime was enough. Thereafter every little shred of evidence which presented itself fit the suggested pattern. I have had to do many disagreeable things in my life, Parker, but what I am about to do is bound to be one of the most unpleasant. There is no need to prolong it. Did you not observe anything interesting about Mayfield's features?"

"I can't say I did."

"He has the same high cheekbones, the same dark complexion, the same kind of hair as Mrs. Norwood. He is certainly her brother. Very probably the housekeeper is their mother, all unknown to

Norwood himself. His wife, you will recall his saying, retained the staff."

We had reached the house, the door to which stood open. Pons tapped lightly and walked in. Mr. and Mrs. Norwood were sitting together on a couch, and Superintendent Lester sat facing them. They ceased to speak as we came in, but only for a moment; then Mrs. Norwood spoke.

"Will you have some tea, gentlemen?"

"Thank you, no," said Pons with unaccustomed brevity. "I am sorry, Superintendent Lester, but it is your duty to place Mrs. Norwood under arrest for the murder of Mrs. Edith Norwood, Miss Louise Norwood, and Miss Elizabeth Sothern yesterday afternoon."

For a moment there was not a sound. Then Norwood, his face blanched, rose with a growl of rage in his throat. His fists were clenched. Superintendent Lester was too surprised to make a move. Pons stood his ground grimly, unalterably, while across from him the pretty, sweet face of Mrs. Iris Norwood underwent a horrible transformation—the sweetness washed from her features, her eyes took fire, her mouth was contorted. Then, even before her husband could reach Pons, she sprang at him like a tiger.

Pons caught her by the hair, twisted it, and brought her to her knees, clawing at his hands.

"Superintendent Lester," commanded Pons curtly. "Mr. Norwood, control yourself."

There was no need to dwell upon that painful scene—the subduing of Mrs. Iris Norwood, the collapse of John Norwood, and the ultimate removal of Mrs. Norwood by police officers summoned from Crowborough, acting on Superintendent Lester's orders. Afterwards, driving back toward Tunbridge Wells, Lester spoke anxiously.

"I suppose, Mr. Pons, that the evidence is all there—but for the life of me, I haven't seen it."

"Perhaps it is all too elementary, Superintendent," said Pons. "Some of us have an unhappy tendency to make a problem far more complex than it is. The evidence is not quite all there—some of it you must turn up for yourself. For instance—railway ticket collectors will need to be found who may remember Mrs. Norwood's having traveled to Frant yesterday. You will certainly find that she carried the two halves of the shotgun in something like a violin case. I commend that approach to you. Mrs. Norwood certainly left her car to be repaired, and caught a train immediately afterwards,



after telephoning to say she was coming for tea at the Norwood cottage.

"But, of course, the facts which present themselves at the scene of the murder are circumstantially quite conclusive. Was not the crime essentially that of a woman? Indeed it was. The table had been set for four, including Miss Sothern. Yet we were given reason to believe that Miss Sothern would not have been seated with Mrs. Norwood and her daughter if their guest had been any but a familiar one. The very incidence of tea at a cottage occupied by three women suggests another woman; if a strange man had come for tea, Miss Sothern would have been serving, not joining them.

"An examination of the turf beneath the window of the sitting-room indicates that Mrs. Iris Norwood stood there for a moment to look in. The circumstances suggest that she may even have shot Mrs. Edith Norwood from that window. She may also have stepped quietly into the house and shot her from the threshold of the room. Certainly Mrs. Edith Norwood was shot in the back. Her daughter fled, and was shot down. Then Miss Sothern in turn took flight, with Mrs. Iris Norwood in pursuit. You said, you will remember, 'There are none but the woman's prints in the turf between the house and the wood.' Not the 'woman's,' Superintendent—but the 'women's'—a close scrutiny will show you that one of the women was somewhat heavier than the other—that was Miss Sothern. Hers was a size six shoe, but there are also prints, however similar to the untutored eye, not as heavily indented, made by a slight woman who wears a four-and-a-half shoe, Mrs. Iris Norwood's size.

"The very reclusive nature of life at the Norwood cottage left one with but little alternative in the identity of the murderer. Did not every testimony we had, including that of Norwood himself, indicate that the ladies entertained very few people? Indeed, the only names which were ever brought forward as familiar visitors, were those of John and Iris Norwood. An intimate serving of tea to a solitary woman guest in mid-afternoon suggests only Iris Norwood.

"She used her brother's gun, certainly. I fancy she convinced him she could not shoot, so that he was ready to believe her story that she had thrown away the cartridges rather than shoot. She threw them away, beyond question both the unused and the used cartridges she calmly gathered up after her brutal crime "

"But her motive, Mr. Pons?" protested Lester.

"There is surely but one possible motive, Superintendent. The woman was jealous of the first Mrs. Norwood, not was her jealousy

of any recent origin. It must have existed a long time ago, even before she managed to break up the Norwood home. Norwood himself never suspected it. He mentioned that she had been an actress. She was never anything else. She fiercely resented every visit he paid to that house, and his spending a day there within the past week was finally the goad to activate her jealousy toward so cruel a crime, the effect of which now falls equally upon her murdered victims and the man she strove to possess so completely. There is no hatred so great as that of one woman for another.

"An ugly, stupid crime, peculiarly feminine in its essential nature. Do you wonder that I subscribe so firmly to single blessedness?"

The Adventure of the Paralytic Mendicant

"ALL THINGS come to him who waits," observed my friend Solar Pons from the window where he stood. "I have waited all morning for one of those little diversions of which I am so fond and which you take such delight in recording, and now, if I am not mistaken, we shall have the offer of one."

I came to his side and looked down into Praed Street. An elderly woman stood below, peering intently up at the number above the outer door. She was tall and angular, dressed soberly in brown, and in rather old-fashioned clothes, her head crowned with one of those dreadful Queen Mary hats. She held a brochure or pamphlet in one hand, while with the other she appeared to be marking a passage on the page she had been reading. From the wrist of her left hand hung a knitted brown reticule.

"What do you make of her, Parker?" asked Pons.

"She is certainly a study in brown," I answered. "And since a conservative in dress - no doubt also in thought."

"Ah, that does not necessarily follow. The cut of her clothes is such as to suggest her rural origin, true. And she is a stranger to London, for that is surely a street guide to the city which she carries in her hand. She is probably a spinster, for she wears no wedding ring, or else someone who has tired of wearing one, but very likely the former. She is employed in a responsible position, and her visit to Number 7B is concerned with her employment. There is a grimness about her features which suggests that she has arrived at the decision to consult someone only after prolonged consideration; but having once arrived at it, nothing will alter it. She is a determined woman, and that is a tribe, my dear fellow, which brooks no interference." He turned away from the window. "But, come, she is on her way up the stairs behind the estimable Mrs. Johnson."

In but a few moments our landlady ushered our visitor into our quarters. The lady's sharp black eyes fixed unerringly on Pons, and it was to him that she introduced herself as Miss Flora Jones, of Bury St. Edmunds. She extended a claw-like hand to me at Pons's introduction.

"Pray feel free to resume your knitting, Miss Jones," invited Pons. "I observe you have carried it with you to while away the hours of your journey."

"Yes, thank you, I will do so," replied our visitor, as she set down her reticule and with great deliberation removed the almost grotesque hat she wore, revealing greying hair drawn tightly about her head. As she sat down, she presented the perfect picture of solid British respectability.

"I have made up my mind to come here solely on my own responsibility," she began at once, "and I am perfectly willing to assume the consequences of that decision. But to tell the truth, Mr. Pons, I can no longer tolerate the circumstances of our existence."

"Your employer would object to this consultation?" asked Pons.

"Indeed he would. But Jabez Horton has lived for so long in retirement that he no longer has a mind of his own."

"Pray let us begin at the beginning," suggested Pons, with a faint smile on his almost ascetic features. "You are employed as a housekeeper by Jabez Horton in Bury St. Edmunds, and have for some time been so employed."

"Fourteen years, Mr. Pons. It is fourteen years to the day this week when Mr. Horton came to Bury St. Edmunds, bought my house at a handsome figure, and retained me to stay on as his housekeeper, with the assistance of my young cousin, Mrs. Ethel Hamish, who does the house today, in my absence. Mr. Horton has always been a man of very few friends. He occasionally corresponds with other gentlemen of fully as sedentary a nature, and very rarely writes letters to *The Times*. Though he has never said so, I took it for granted that he was a retired Colonial.

"He is a man of very regular habits. He rises at the same hour every day, takes his meals on the hour, spends his days reading, playing chess by post, and taking one solitary walk, customarily at dusk. He is reticent but amiable; I find it necessary to remind myself constantly that it is he who owns the house and not I who am his landlady."

She had taken her knitting from her reticule, and was now industriously knitting, the clicking of her needles making a distant obbligato to her narrative. Her fingers fairly flew at her work, which was done so automatically that she seldom removed her eyes from Pons's face even to examine her handiwork.

"It is my custom every morning to take his post in to him. He subscribes to several newspapers and magazines, but he receives few

letters. A week ago, I brought him his post, as usual. There was one letter. I took particular notice of it because it was addressed with letters which had been cut out of a newspaper or some other printed paper, and his name had been misspelled 'Hindon.' His eye fell upon this the moment I handed him his letters; I saw his colour change, he grew white; he gasped, and his hand when he dropped the post to his desk was shaking. He was very greatly agitated. I have seen him so only once before, about four months ago, when he received a cablegram from South Africa. What was in the envelope, I do not know; I believe he destroyed it. I have, however, brought you the envelope itself. You will see it has been posted from Southampton."

So saying, she reached into her reticule and deposited a cheap, almost yellowed envelope in Pons's hand. I leaned over Pons's shoulder and looked at it. Its address had manifestly been painstakingly constructed from the printed page, each letter of the name having been printed separately, though the address seemed to have been cut from a guide and pasted upon the envelope. The name was misspelled just as Miss Jones had said.

"On the following day, Mr. Horton received another such envelope, this time posted from London. When he took it from my hand, his face was the picture of dread; he could not conceal it; I was shocked. He did not open it in my presence, but I had scarcely left the room before he did so. Immediately he cried out in an anguished voice. I was on my way back to the room when the door burst open, and he ran out, hatless and without having changed his smoking-jacket; and without a word, left the house. This singular conduct distressed me exceedingly. Mr. Pons, all the more so since it was several hours before we had any communication from him. Then it was by means of a trunk-call from Lowestoft, and he had called only to say that we were not to admit anyone to the house, in any circumstances. He returned home that night, and since that time he has remained virtually a prisoner in his house; he has not gone out for his customary evening walk, he has not permitted himself to be seen. I ventured to suggest that if someone had threatened him, he ought to consult the police; he forbade me to speak of the subject again.

"But now he is in such a state that he is virtually ill. Indeed, he has become so indifferent to events that I was able to abstract the contents of the final envelope and bring it along. It is a curious little thing of glass, wired to a piece of pasteboard "

This, too, came out of her reticule.

The moment Pons caught sight of it, he uttered a delighted cry. "Ah! what have we here? My dear lady, have you had it appraised?"

"I wondered," she said simply.

It was a tiny piece of glass, wrought in the shape of a miniature dagger, wired, as Miss Jones had said, to a piece of pasteboard. Below it were pasted a letter H, and the numeral 5.

"Even wrought glass has little value," I said.

"Come, come, Parker look again," chided Pons. "This is no piece of glass. It is a diamond."

"Sent in an ordinary envelope, not even by registered post?" I asked incredulously. "Pons, you are joking."

"On the contrary, my dear fellow. It is most certainly a diamond, and cut from a stone of respectable size. Only a man of wealth would so have cut a stone of sufficient size to have brought him a princely sum at its sale."

Our visitor was already stretching out her hand for the piece of card with its precious cargo. "I must return it before he discovers its absence," she said. And, having tucked it away once more into her reticule, she asked, "Mr. Pons, will you undertake to call on him without permitting him to discover that I have visited you?"

"I shall, indeed. I shall follow you by the next train to Bury St. Edmunds," promised Pons. "I should like to keep the envelope for the time being, if you can part with it."

After she had gone, Pons placed the envelope under the table-lamp and studied it. "Here," he said, "is a little object to test your powers of deduction, Parker. Come, tell me about the sender."

"Clearly, he fears to be identified through his handwriting," I ventured.

"The ragged cuttings do not appear to you significant? They are left-hand cuttings."

"He was in haste."

"On the contrary, these communications seem to me as acts of singular deliberation, very carefully planned. Certainly, they have been months in the preparation, perhaps years."

"Oh, come, Pons! You are joking!"

"No, it is not too much to suppose that the cablegram which Horton received from Capetown inaugurated the present phase of a sequence of events of which these letters are but another. Are not the largest diamond mines in the world in South Africa? I submit, Parker, that the sender of these communications is very well known

to Horton, and therefore he would have no reason to attempt to conceal his identity. No, he is probably unable to write."

"An illiterate," I agreed. "He twice misspelled Horton's name."

"Twice in the same way," agreed Pons dryly. "I submit that an illiterate is not likely to make even the same error in spelling precisely the same a second time. His inability is not grown from illiteracy. And what manner of 'illiterate' would send so elaborate a notice as a diamond dagger?"

"It would seem to me that only a very ignorant fellow would send a precious jewel in a plain and insubstantial envelope."

"Or a very rich one," added Pons, "though it is seldom the common post that is stolen, only the registered. He may have known as much." He came to his feet as he spoke. "I suggest that haste is indicated. Let us not lose a moment to reach Mr. Jabez Horton in his perilous seclusion. We may already be too late."

We were fortunate enough to catch the same train Miss Jones took from Liverpool Street Station, though we sat apart from her, Pons in contemplative silence, his deerstalker cap pulled low over his keen eyes which appeared to brood upon the passing landscape but were focused instead upon some unknown landscape of his mind.

Despite our haste, Pons's last words were prophetic, for our arrival late that day in Bury St. Edmunds found us precipitated into the midst of great confusion at the home of Miss Jones's employer, Jabez Horton. Miss Jones herself had reached the house but five minutes before our own arrival, just as the local police-inspector, accompanied by a medical man, came upon the scene. They had been summoned by Mrs. Ethel Hamish, who had less than ten minutes previously discovered Horton dead in his study.

Miss Jones's appearance served to calm her cousin's hysteria, after which the housekeeper introduced Pons and myself to Police-Inspector Ronald Martin, and Dr. Edmund Quinn, both men in early middle age, and both familiar enough with Pons's reputation to be affable and lenient about our presence. Pons immediately subjected the room to the customary intensive examination at which I marveled time after time, for no details seemed to escape his eye.

The body still in a half upright position, sat in an easy-chair beside the table. Horton was a big man, bearded, of approximately sixty years of age. In life he might have been bluff and hearty, save that Miss Jones's narrative of his reticence did not fit such a

description, however much his physical person might have justified it. Horton had died, apparently, just after he had taken a drink, for two glasses still stood before him on the table, one empty, the other half-emptied. Whisky and soda stood on a tray on one end of the table. The manner of Horton's death was plain to see; his throat had been cut from ear to ear; he made a grotesque and horrible sight. A bloody knife of some foreign manufacture lay on the floor beneath his right hand, as if he had dropped it there. Quite evident in the confining room, despite an open window, was the unmistakable smell of ammonia.

The police-inspector watched Pons's examination of the room and its effects with no attempt to conceal his interest and, when Pons at last directed his attention to the body, after Dr. Quinn had completed his examination, he inquired whether Pons might not like to hear what Mrs. Hamish had to say.

"If it will in no way incommode you, inspector," agreed Pons.

"By no means, Mr. Pons. It may well be that you will catch something I am likely to miss."

Pons smiled wryly. "I fear you, like my good friend, Dr. Parker, put too much confidence in my poor powers."

The police-inspector interviewed a still tearful Ethel Hamish in the kitchen. Miss Jones's cousin was one of those bland-faced women whose features, no matter how emotional, inevitably suggest comparison with members of the equine family. Nevertheless, despite her near-hysteria, she told a straightforward story under the watchful eyes of Miss Jones, who saw her through her story and then discreetly left the room when the inspector began to question her.

Mrs. Hamish had been about her duties all morning without other interruption than the post, which had consisted of but one magazine and two daily papers. She had taken these in to Horton as soon as the postman had left them. Then she had prepared and taken in his lunch. He had not gone out on any occasion. Shortly after lunch, however, the Reverend Francis Birch the local vicar, had called; he was soliciting for charity. Horton had permitted him to be shown into his study, and he had evidently given him a contribution, for the vicar thanked him profusely when Horton saw him to the door; Ethel had heard their conversation from the kitchen. Half an hour later a beggar had come to the back door, but Mrs. Hamish had not opened to him. Thereupon he went around to the front, where she had had to open the door and demand that he go away, though she was filled with pity for him

and at the same time intrigued by him. He was a paralytic, whose whole right side seemed to have suffered the effects of a stroke, for he dragged his right foot and got around only with the aid of a stout stick. He was accompanied by a bird, which sat on his shoulder. He refused to accept Ethel's dismissal, and demanded word with the master. Horton had overheard the altercation and came out of his study, calling out, "Here, Ethel, what's all this?"

Then he had caught sight of the beggar. "It's this beggar, Mr. Horton," Mrs. Hamish had explained. "He won't be off, though I've told him." Horton had come up to the door and looked at the beggar. He had muttered something. It sounded like "MacKaugh," but Mrs. Hamish could not now be certain. To her surprise, Horton had dismissed her and invited the beggar into his study. Soon thereafter he had come to the kitchen for whisky and soda. What he and the beggar had talked about, she did not know. But Horton had sounded genial when he saw the man to the door; Mrs. Hamish had heard them speaking from upstairs. She had watched the beggar go off down the street, while Horton returned to the study. Then she heard Horton call to her, to tell her to take the whisky and soda away when she found time. She did not think she had to hurry; he had not sounded urgent. She took her time. She had not heard him call again, but the beggar was still in sight far down the road with that bird of his flying after him, when at last she went downstairs and discovered Horton as they saw him.

The study had not seemed to her altered in any respect, since her last visit to it, save that a window stood wide open. She did not know whether Horton had opened it, or whether one of his visitors had done so.

"There is one important question, Mrs. Hamish," said the inspector, who had carefully refrained from interrupting her statement. "You are quite certain you saw the beggar you describe going off down the street when your employer called to you?"

"Yes, indeed."

"And how long a time would you say passed between the moment he called you and the time you discovered Mr. Horton dead?"

"Perhaps a quarter of an hour."

"And the beggar was still in sight at this time?"

She nodded. "You see, sir, he walked very slowly. He was badly crippled. And there's no houses on this side of the street; you can see for quite a way."

"Well, it would seem probable that Mr. Horton took his own life, but in case the finding should be otherwise, it would then be

possible that someone entered the study through the open window during that interval and took his life."

"I suppose so. No one came through the doors, that I'll swear."

"You heard nothing in the study to suggest a struggle?"

"Nothing at all."

The inspector turned to my companion, who had preserved a reflective silence. "Would you like to ask anything, Mr. Pons?"

"I submit that the mendicant's feathered companion does not seem to have been adequately described," said Pons. "I daresay Mrs. Hamish must have noticed it. How big was it, Mrs. Hamish? As big as a rook, a raven, a kestrel?"

"As big as a kestrel."

"It was not a familiar bird?"

"Not at all."

"Ah, the bird of ill omen or ill passage, most likely," said Pons dryly. "And the beggar, Mrs. Hamish. How old would you say he was?"

"Quite old." She was hesitant; then she added, "Over sixty. As he was crippled, it was hard to tell."

"And Mr. Horton—did he appear to be upset at sight of his visitor?"

"He was surprised. I could see it by the way he looked. But I thought it was the sight of that bird on his shoulder."

"Did Mr. Horton seem in any way disturbed when he came to the kitchen for whisky and soda?"

"No, sir. He was more like his old self than he had been for weeks—months, almost. Quite cheerful, in fact."

"Mrs. Hamish, there is in the study a mild smell of ammonia. Did you at any time in the course of the morning have occasion to use ammonia in that room?"

"I did not enter the study until I brought Mr. Horton his post," said Mrs. Hamish with prim severity, quite as if Pons had suggested that she had been guilty of a misdemeanour. "We never use ammonia in the house."

"And in a partially open drawer of the table, there is a revolver. It was Mr. Horton's?"

"Yes, Mr. Pons."

"Thank you, Mrs. Hamish. Come, Parker. I would like a word with Miss Jones."

The inspector interposed, firmly but respectfully, his watchful eyes fixed on Pons's face. "Is there anything you especially noticed, Mr. Pons?" he asked.

"I would commend to your attention particularly the mendicant's curious companion," said Pons, and passed by, as if unaware of the bafflement that shone forth in Police-Inspector Martin's ruddy face.

Miss Jones received us with a face devoid of emotion, though there was stony regret in her voice when she said briefly, "I waited too long, I fear, Mr. Pons. I cannot believe Mr. Horton took his own life."

"We shall discover that in good time," answered Pons. "Can you now suggest any source for the smell of ammonia which still lingers in the study?"

"No, Mr. Pons, I cannot."

Pons deliberated for a moment. "You mentioned that your late employer was in the habit of corresponding sparsely. Can you give me the names of his regular correspondents? Particularly, I suggest, someone in Lowestoft?"

"I believe I could find them for you, Mr. Pons."

"You mentioned Mr. Horton's receipt of a cablegram some months ago. Did Mr. Horton retain it?"

"Yes, I know just where it is. Excuse me."

She left the room at once, with purpose in her step. I sought to catch Pons's eye, for certain of his questions and the recommendations he had made to the accommodating police-inspector mystified me; but he did not glance in my direction, and sat lost in thought, toying with the lobe of his left ear, a habit in his preoccupation.

Miss Jones returned and handed Pons the cablegram she had mentioned. Pons read it and passed it on to me without comment. It, too, was addressed to Jabez Hindon, and bore this cryptic message:

MATTER OF BURKE'S ESTATE ALL SETTLED. THE OLD MAN IS FREE
AS FAR AS KNOWN. ALL MY BEST WISHES. FAREWELL.

It was signed simply H.

"And here," added Miss Jones, "are the names and addresses of his regular correspondents. There were but two, and these envelopes are representative of many among his papers."

"Douglas Harrigan, Lowestoft," read Pons. "And Zaharias Heggett, of Norwich. They are almost in the immediate vicinity; certainly neither place is very far from Bury St. Edmunds, either by road or by rail. I shall just take these envelopes with me, Miss Jones. What of their contents?"

"Unless they have been impounded by the police, they are in the study. Mr. Horton's body has been removed."

"Let us just see, if you please, Miss Jones."

The three of us descended to the study, where the inspector was in charge. Miss Jones went straight to the desk, opened a side drawer, and drew forth a packet of letters which she offered to Pons.

"With your leave, Inspector," said Pons.

"Certainly, Mr. Pons. I shall be grateful for any assistance you may be able to give me."

"Very well, then, let us just examine these letters, which have come to Mr. Horton from friends in Lowestoft and Norwich. There are not many; neither man appears to have been a verbose correspondent. What we are looking for, Inspector, is certain information which we may find in these letters from a day approximately four months ago when Mr. Horton received this cablegram."

Pons handed the cablegram to Inspector Martin, and while the inspector puzzled over it, he busied himself with the letters, sorting rapidly through the pile.

"Now here we are," he said. "Last winter. The letters appear to be but the usual round of trivial events, set forth from one man to an old friend. They are written at fortnightly intervals. Now, then," he went on, searching through the pile, "the date of the cablegram is April twenty-seventh, and here is a letter postmarked the twenty-eighth at Lowestoft." He opened the envelope in his hand, took out the letter, unfolded it, and read, "'A cable from H. You have probably also had one. What are we to do?' Admirably succinct, our Mr. Harrigan."

He turned the letter over to Inspector Martin and picked up another. "Ah, here is one from Mr. Heggett in the same vein. How commendably reticent these gentlemen are! And here is Mr. Harrigan, evidently in answer to Horton's reply. 'Sit tight, indeed! We have done nothing else for these last twelve years. Let us not wait, but go out to meet him. H. would know where to reach him. I am cabling him today.' Our Mr. Harrigan, at least, is forehanded. Here is yet another, dated the following day."

As Pons opened the letter, a cutting dropped out. He caught it deftly, but gave his attention first to the covering letter. "Ah, this is most terse of all. 'Too late!'" He turned to the extract, read it silently to himself, and placed it without comment on the desk for all to see. It was clearly an item from a national newspaper, the

typeface of which suggested the *Daily Mail*. It was headed "Guymon Director Dies," and was concise.

Capetown (Reuters): Alastair Higby, late of Guymon Diamonds, Ltd., was found dead in bed early this morning by his man-servant at his home in Boerwal Road, Capetown. A preliminary report indicated that Mr. Higby took his own life. He had been in ill health for some time, and had been despondent and melancholy for the past few days. Mr. Higby retired from the directorate of Guymon Diamonds, Ltd., eight years ago.

We had hardly finished reading this before Pons placed beside it a crumpled rectangle of paper, upon which were pasted five letters, cut from printed headlines. All were the same letter, and across one had been placed a large X, in a shaky hand.

~~X~~ H H H

"That is all," said Pons. "We hardly need more."

"I'm afraid this is all very puzzling, Mr. Pons," said the inspector.

But Pons was looking at his watch with an air of absorption. "I fear there is not much time to be lost, Inspector. Dr. Parker and I are off to Lowestoft to call on Mr. Douglas Harrigan. I shall be happy to communicate any little discoveries I may make. Good-evening, Miss Jones."

When we were seated once more in a train on the way to Lowestoft, fortunately in a compartment empty of other passengers, I observed that the problem presented by Miss Jones was a mystifying one, indeed, and added, "Not the least part of it, I should point out, was your own conduct of it, Pons."

"On the contrary," answered my companion, "the whole thing is as plain as a pikestaff, and my conduct would surely have been completely explicable to anyone but that good young police-inspector, who was, alas! too much impressed with our presence to use his wits. I have come to expect this obstinacy in the face of the elementary from you, Parker, but I am always distressed by it in our constabulary."

"Obstinacy, indeed!" I protested. "I am certainly not thick-headed enough to believe for an instant that Horton killed himself. He was clearly murdered, but by whom, I would not at this point

presume to say. I may say, however, that I suspect the man MacKaugh."

At this my companion burst into laughter which was nothing short of uproarious. Noticing my stolid refusal to join in his amusement at whatever had touched him, he controlled himself.

"Pray forgive me, Parker, but you have an uncanny faculty for rousing what must surely seem a too often dormant sense of humour," he said. "It had not occurred to me that you had so misunderstood. There is no man named MacKaugh involved in the matter, I assure you. There is only a native South American bird known as a macaw, the companion of that curious figure, the paralytic mendicant. But come, Parker, you have all the facts; you need only reconstruct them properly."

"It could not have been the vicar," I began slowly.

"Dear me! Why are we always so willing and ready to exculpate the clergy, who have certainly as much opportunity to commit crimes as other professional men?"

"And the beggar, by all accounts, would hardly be a match for a man as strong as Horton must have been."

"Ah, that leaves us with the macaw," said Pons with impish sobriety. Then he smiled and raised one eyebrow, lending his aquiline features an expression that was almost Mephistophelian. "The smell of ammonia suggests nothing to you? Let me elucidate a little. You may have noticed on the floor around the body small fragments of glass, varying in thickness."

I confessed I had not noticed them, though I had been aware of Pons's scrutiny of the floor about the bloodstained dagger.

"What does this added fact convey to you, in the light of events?"

"That something was broken."

Pons closed his eyes. He sighed. "Let us go back to the beginning Mr. Hindon arrives here fourteen years ago. . . ."

"The name is Horton, Pons."

"Is it, indeed? I wonder. Let us just postulate that Horton is the assumed name, Hindon the correct one. At least, it is safe to assume that Hindon was the name he used up to fourteen years ago. I submit that his anonymous correspondent deliberately used his old name as an added factor in inspiring fear, for he was the only one who had no reason to fear anyone. Hindon's South African correspondent used his alias, and his cablegram began this sequence of events. You will recall its wording. 'Matter of Burke's estate all settled. The old man is free as far as known. All my best

wishes. Farewell.' Now this is plain as a pikestaff; one of the most elementary ciphers is involved. Taking every fifth word we have a clear warning: 'All is known. Farewell.'"

"But how do you arrive at every fifth word, Pons?"

"Why, it is elementary, Parker. It would be the natural figure to suggest itself because there were five men involved in the problem."

"What five men?" I asked in bewilderment.

Pons clucked his disapproval. "Dear me, Parker, this is child's play. It is all clear enough. There were originally five men whose names began with H. They were banded together in some form of association or unified by some common deed. They were thus the five H's. Now, if you were one of them, and you wished to communicate with another without signing your name but only your initial, how would you identify yourself to your correspondent? Surely you would assume a number. Thus there could have been H, H 2, H 3, H 4, and H 5."

"Ah, the diamond dagger!"

"Precisely, Parker. It was signed 'H5,' as you saw. And Mr. Higby, surely, was H. Mr. Hindon or Horton, if you prefer, could have been one of three—H 2, H 3, or H 4. His friends Harrigan and Heggett bore the remaining numbers. Thus you will plainly understand the significance of the printed communication which our late friend received from Southampton and which Miss Jones thought he had destroyed, though he had saved it from oblivion after crumpling it up. The crossed-out H represented Mr. Higby; the score was one to three. Hindon understood very well. And he was not unaware of the significance of the progressively nearing places of mailing—first Capetown, then the port of Southampton, finally London; someone was coming steadily closer. The diamond dagger came from London; this could have been nothing more or less than a warning of death; this, too, Hindon understood; he rushed off at once to take council with Mr. Harrigan of Lowestoft, and perhaps the two of them telephoned through to Heggett of Norwich. If they held a council of war, they must have decided to stay put."

"You are suggesting that the beggar is H 5?" I inquired incredulously.

"Surely it is obvious? You will recall the manner of his communication, the ragged cutting of the letters? He is not left-handed; his right side is very largely paralyzed; he cannot write."

"And a man of but a quarter of Horton's strength would have

been able to toss him from the room like a paperweight," I retorted.

"That is only too true, in any ordinary circumstance."

"And you will recall that Mrs. Hamish's testimony was not shaken — the beggar was well down the street the last time she spoke to her employer. She is his best witness."

"You are a stubborn man, Parker," said Pons, nodding. "I fear I cannot cope with such stubbornness."

"We are left with the open window, and I am afraid, Pons, that it is too much to expect me to believe that the beggar came back and crawled into the room through the window when even the door must have been enough for him to manage. Someone, then, went through the window. It was not the Reverend Birch, and it was most certainly not the beggar, since that would have been simply beyond his ability to do, always assuming that his paralysis was genuine."

"I think we may be certain of that."

"Very well, then. The window was obviously the place of entrance and escape."

"Certainly someone escaped by it. I concede so much. But I am afraid that the only person who did get through that open window was Horton."

"Or Hindon, since you prefer it so."

Pons shook his head, with a little smile about his lips. "This time, no, my dear Parker. Horton, not Hindon."

With this exhibition of sheer contentiousness, Pons lapsed into thoughtful silence, from which I was disinclined to rouse him. He sat unmoving, save for the lighting of his calabash, until the train drew into Lowestoft at dusk. For my own part, I could not very well contain my feeling of triumph, even though I had learned from experience it might be short-lived.

Our quarry, Douglas Harrigan, proved to be a tall, thin-faced man past middle age. He was not unlike Pons in appearance, and I saw at a professional glance that he was a sick man who had not very many more months to live. We did not succeed in getting in to see him until Pons sent in a note; then Harrigan, who lived alone with one man-servant, sent for us. We found him bundled up in a dressing-gown in a small sitting-room.

"So it has come to this," he murmured at our entrance. "I know you by reputation, Mr. Pons." He turned to his servant. "Leave us.

William." After he had gone, Harrigan asked, "Which one of them called you in, sir?"

"The late Mr. Hindon's housekeeper," answered Pons.

Harrigan's eyes narrowed, and his jaw jutted briefly forth. "So, Hindon is gone, too!"

"And Heggett?"

"Only a day ago, Mr. Pons. Suicide!" He laughed bitterly. "Higby, Heggett—now Hindon. Only I am left; it is between us two now. It will be either Hrenville or me. Well, I am ready for him."

"But not, I fancy, as ready as I am. He will surprise you, Mr. Harrigan. He is a paralytic; his right side is virtually useless; he has difficulty in walking. He has not the strength of a rabbit."

"And yet three men have died after he threatened them?" asked Harrigan in manifest disbelief.

"And you will be the fourth, unless I can prevail upon you to permit me to take your place when he calls. We are not unlike in appearance. A little grease paint, and I may be able to deceive him."

"I can fight my battles alone."

"Pray overlook my insistence. His methods are strange."

"Sir, I will permit your concealment in the room. And your companion's. But I will stand against him myself."

Pons looked about for convenient hiding-places, his eyes lingering on a doorway to an adjoining room, on a cabinet against one wall. "Very well, Mr. Harrigan. I daresay he will call on you either tonight or tomorrow morning. He will hardly dare to let much more time elapse, or the coincidence of his presence on the scene of death in Bury St. Edmunds and Norwich will arouse a hue and cry for him. Now, then, we have not much time. I am in some doubt only about what happened in Capetown fourteen years ago."

Harrigan hesitated for some time, staring straight ahead of him. Clearly, he was struggling against the habit of the long silence under which he had lived with his secret. But at last he sighed and spoke.

"I suppose it will all come out in good time, anyway. And it cannot matter now to anyone but myself. The five of us were banded together in a plan to rob Guymon Diamonds, Ltd. Higby was the brains; he planned and the rest of us carried out his plans. We robbed the firm both in the mines and at the office; it was systematic, and we knew we were bound to be discovered. But Higby had plans for that moment of discovery, the four of us were

to take the blame, but before our arrest, we were to dynamite one of the least productive of the mines and be 'caught' in the cave-in."

"But it did not go according to plan, I take it?"

"No, Mr. Pons, it did not. Almost, but not quite. We went down into the mine, we set the time fuses, and we slipped out without being seen. Higby's car was waiting for us. But Hrenville didn't get out in time, and there were others in the mine; there weren't supposed to be. Two other men were killed, and Hrenville was badly mangled, which is undoubtedly the reason for his paralysis. Hrenville was the only one recovered, and because it was assumed that the rest of us had been buried in the cave-in, it was Hrenville who had to bear the prosecution for the thefts. Higby, of course, was in the clear, and though Hrenville blamed us for his capture, and for letting him serve thirteen years in prison, which was what they gave him, there was nothing we could do. Higby slipped us out of South Africa, and we came back to England under assumed names. We made very few changes, but settled in parts of the country which were far enough away from our native places to avoid any chance of meeting anyone we knew. Higby faithfully divided the loot, and held Hrenville's share for him when he turned up. It was considerable, Mr. Pons.

"Well, when Hrenville got out, he demanded more than his share. Higby balked. So Hrenville got nasty. I looked for that to happen, all along. I wanted to deal with Hrenville, but before I got through to Higby, he was gone. Whether it was Hrenville's work or not, I don't know. It might be that Higby took his own life; he had lived for so long as a much-respected citizen, that he could hardly have faced life without that respectability. He may have done it. But not Hindon, and not Heggett. My own name was originally Harrison; Heggett's was Haggerty. You see, we made but slight changes, just enough to avoid identification. Hrenville and Higby had no need to alter their names." He shrugged. "I don't know that it matters now, except as a principle. Hrenville lives only for his vengeance. I, like all the others, have received my warning."

"The diamond dagger."

He nodded. "Hrenville follows such rules as we had. Oh, we were clever thieves, Mr. Pons! But that was long ago, now. It seems hardly to be believed."

At this point in Harrigan's reminiscence, the doorbell pealed.

A momentary silence fell in the room. Outside sounded the

footsteps of Harrigan's man-servant on his way to answer the door.

"William!" Harrigan called sharply.

His man appeared on the threshold. "You called?"

"William, if that is a cripple at the door, show him in here. I will see him. I expect him."

William withdrew, and Harrigan waved us away. "It could be no one else, gentlemen. Conceal yourselves."

"I will take the cabinet, Parker; you take the adjoining room. Follow my signal, but keep your nostrils protected."

We took our places, myself with my eye to the keyhole of the door behind which I was concealed. In but a little while, William ushered into the room we had just quitted a wisp of a man, a pathetic figure in reality, who dragged himself along with the aid of a stick, and was seemingly unable to walk except by dint of lurching hideously from side to side. To one shoulder clung a silent bird with a hooked beak and a long sweeping tail. It was brightly coloured, and wore white patches of feathers around each eye.

Hrenville lurched to a position directly before Harrigan.

"Ye were expectin' me, Mr. Harrigan?"

"I was, Mr. Hrenville." He turned to his man. "You may go, William. I will call when I am ready for you."

"I'm not much of a man, Harrigan," said Hrenville in a thin, whining voice.

"Half-man, half-bird," said Harrigan, contemptuously. "What are you here for? A half-man like you sending threats!"

"I wanted to see ye before ye died, Harrigan," said Hrenville slowly, with an almost benign expression on his twisted face. "Old times. Old crimes, eh? And new, too!" He cackled with laughter. Then suddenly, leering at Harrigan, he swayed on his stick and asked, "What do ye think o' my bird, Harrigan?"

"Parrot, is it?"

"Macaw. The most remarkable macaw you ever did sec." He turned to the bird, fawning upon it. "Ye've heard the man, Mac. Talk to him."

"'Parrot, is it?'" mimicked the parrot in a perfect reproduction of Harrigan's voice.

"Say some more, pet," whispered Hrenville.

"'Half-man, half-bird. What are you here for? A half man like you sending threats! You may go, William Parrot, is it?'"

The macaw preened his feathers, chuckled, and was still.

"And if I was to say to you, 'Good-night, Mr. Harrigan?'" Hrenville went on, his eyes fixed on the bird. "What would you be sayin'?"

"Good-night, Mr. Hrenville." The parrot reconsidered. "Good-night, my friend."

"We've had a good little talk, Mr. Harrigan."

"We have, indeed," said the macaw.

"And then, afterward," said Hrenville in a horrible voice, "I would whistle and he would come to me. See—" he turned once more to his feathered companion. "Go to the door now, Mac."

Obediently the bird flew to the door by way of which Hrenville had entered the room. There it perched high on top of the frame, waiting.

"Do ye mind if I show you what a remarkable bird that is?" asked Hrenville.

"Go ahead," said Harrigan.

"I'll need to open a window."

"Right over there," said Harrigan.

Hrenville dragged himself to a window and opened it. He came back to where Harrigan sat. Harrigan watched him intently, puzzled and off his guard. Hrenville came close to the chair, fumbling with some baubles in his hand. Two of them rolled from his fingers. He bent to retrieve them.

"Ye'll have to forgive me, Harrigan. I'm not the man I was. We're gettin' old, the both of us."

But when he looked up again, pulling himself up along his stick, he had something wadded in his nostrils. At the same moment, Harrigan began to claw at his throat, choking and gasping. The thing in Hrenville's left hand was a dagger.

With a bound and a flying leap, Pons was out of the cabinet and upon Hrenville. It took but a moment to push Hrenville aside, knock the weapon from his hand, and drag the chair with Harrigan in it away. By that time, I too, was in the room, my nostrils covered with my handkerchief, for I had recognized the gas fumes which were choking Harrigan, and which had been released when Hrenville had stepped upon the ampoules containing the concentrated fumes of ammonia, strong enough to have put Harrigan into a stupor for sufficient time to permit Hrenville to cut his throat.

Hearing the commotion, William, too, came into the room, armed with a small but serviceable revolver.



"This man," said Pons, "is to be delivered to Police-Inspector Martin of Bury St. Edmunds, charged with the murder of Jabez Hindon, alias Horton." He turned to Harrigan. "As for you, Mr. Harrigan, I am afraid that our report will of necessity include the affair of the robbery of Guymon Diamonds, Ltd."

Harrigan smiled a bitter smile. "I will never stand trial, Mr. Pons."

On the train back to London, we were accompanied by the remarkable macaw which belonged to the paralytic Hrenville. The bird sat decorously on Pons's shoulder, preening itself, as if aware of the role it had played and the role it might yet need to play at Hrenville's trial.

"I trust that the matter has now been solved to your satisfaction, Parker," said my companion, not without a glint of humour in his eyes.

"Yes, yes, I see it all," I said testily. "The ammonia fumes stupefied Hindon, and the parrot spoke in his voice after Hindon was dead. Hrenville left him in the room, and at his whistle, the parrot spoke his last line, which was coached him by his owner, and then the bird flew out of the window."

"Elementary, my dear fellow," said Pons. "It was really obvious from the beginning, when Mrs. Hamish testified to seeing the bird 'flying after' Hrenville. So it was indeed the 'Horton' she had heard who escaped by means of the open window, just as the bird would have made off tonight. And how ingenious of Hrenville to send the macaw far enough away from the fumes, high on the door frame! What a time and patience of training he must have put in on this remarkable bird! As a matter of fact, I know just the place for him once the trial is over. You will recall that little service Her Majesty performed for us as a reward for some trifling errand we did for her? She caused my brother to be knighted. I believe she would appreciate the gift of this bird."

He turned to the macaw, imitating Hrenville's voice.

"What do you say, Pet?"

The macaw cocked its head at Pons and said gravely, "Elementary, my dear fellow." He swayed on Pons's shoulders and peered at me adding, "What a time and patience of training he must have put in on this remarkable bird!"

The Adventure of the Trained Cormorant

"IT HAS BEEN a full six months since I have seen a dog-cart in the streets of London," said Solar Pons, as we rounded the corner into Praed Street and bore down upon 7B, "and that one, if I mistake not, is the work of an unreconstructed individualist. I permit myself to hope it may be a harbinger of some little problem to break the monotony of our summer days."

The object of Pons's interest stood before the steps to our own quarters, and, as we drew near, I could appreciate more fully Pons's comment. The dog-cart was in itself a little masterpiece of brown, tan, and grey-white wood of all kinds.

"Wrought by hand in its entirety," murmured Pons, his eyes gleaming. "And come from some distance, would you not say, Parker?"

"Mud on the wheels—chalk and dust—elementary," I said. "Folkestone—Dover?"

"Say, rather, further round the coast. The mud is a clay found in South Kent, the chalk dust lies over it, and what surmounts both is the dust of London." Pons was bending over the dog cart in close scrutiny as he spoke. "Moreover, it has been driven here by a man with a wooden leg, who carried a parcel of some kind strapped to the cart."

"His portmanteau," I suggested. "He is a sycophant come to London to take lodgings with us and study your methods."

"Ah, you are waggish this evening, Parker," said Pons, smiling. "No, it was not a portmanteau. I should venture to guess a crate, containing, if the evidence before my eyes is not deceptive, a bird." He caught up a downy feather between thumb and forefinger and released it into the gentle breeze which made its way down Praed Street.

"I'm willing to concede the bird," I said. "But surely you can say more of our visitor than that he has a wooden leg. I can see those markings very well for myself in the bottom of the cart."

"Ah—how familiarity does breed contempt!" exclaimed Pons with a droll expression on his usually saturnine features. "I can say but little more, my dear fellow—save that our caller is a man past

middle age, of some little weight, obviously a man of the sea, for his cart is the result of his own craftsmanship wrought upon what must have been for the most part driftwood, one might add, on venture, a stubborn, determined man who drives himself as hard as he did in his youth. He is given to smoking a homely mixture of shag which would put even my own to shame in its potency, and he wears, at the moment, orange corduroy trousers, as the threads on the rough edge of his seat suggest. But enough of this; let us just see what he has to say."

So saying, Pons turned to mount to our lodgings on the second floor of Number 7.

Our visitor was sprawled comfortably in Pons's own chair beside the fireplace. At our entrance, he came to his feet with a grizzled smile, and doffed his cap. He was a man of some sixty-odd years, more grey than dark of hair, with a rough, weather-beaten face. He stood on a wooden leg, visible from knee to floor, and did indeed wear orange corduroy trousers, with a dark blue jacket of like material. He was not corpulent, but he was heavy and solidly built. Moreover, he had been waiting for some time, as the dottle in the fireplace and the strong pungent odour of tobacco suggested.

"Beggin' your pardon, Mr. Pons," he said, inclining his head to my companion. "Captain Andrew Walton."

"Once in the China trade. Late of the *Welkin*, I see," said Pons, eyeing a scarf knotted about his neck.

"Aye, and the *Barbados* before her, and many a ship before that."

"Not long retired."

"Two years, sir."

"Living on the south coast."

"Aye, sir. Not far from New Romney, above the Dungeness Lighthouse."

Pons had removed his Inverness and deerstalker as he spoke. He slipped into his worn purple dressing-gown, exchanged his shoes for his slippers, and settled himself with a pipeful of shag, while our visitor waited politely for Pons's signal to continue.

"Me and Adelaide," he went on then, "have come all the way to London from our little house. . . ."

"Surely you didn't bring Mrs. Walton with you on such a long journey by dog-cart!" I put in.

Our visitor favoured me with an astonished stare

Pons laughed heartily. "Forgive me, Parker. Your little

deductions never fail to touch me," he said. Coming to his feet, he strode across to the chair in which our visitor had been sitting, caught hold of it, and turned it to one side, revealing a large crate in which sat a solitary black bird. "This is Captain Walton's 'Adelaide.' "

"A raven!" I cried.

"A cormorant," retorted Pons. "A fishing bird well known to England's waters, and in various parts of the world, but most especially Japan and the China coast, where the bird is gainfully employed and highly prized by coast fishermen."

"Aye, and a better fisher than Adelaide hasn't been born, and you may lay to that, Mr. Pons. I've had her nigh on to seven years, and I wouldn't have brought her along on such a trip, only that I'd no way of knowing what might go on while I was away from the house. . . ."

Pons's eyes twinkled. "I take it, Captain Walton, something has disturbed the even tenor of your days."

"Aye, sir, that it has."

So saying, our visitor leaned forward and phlegmatically unstrapped his wooden leg, from the cushion of which he extracted a compact case of what appeared to be black leather. It was somewhat rectangular in shape, very much like a gentleman's large flat pocket wallet, except that it was not folded and was rather more bulky. This he handed to me for Pons. I was surprised at its lightness.

"Cork lined," observed Pons, the moment he touched it. "Meant to float." His eyes danced. "I trust I am not amiss in guessing that the faithful Adelaide brought it to you?"

"Aye, sir. Now have a look at it. It's just as I found it, with one exception. It had a little waterproof wrapping around it; that I took off."

"Why haven't you brought it?"

"I'll be coming to that in my time."

Pons opened the cork-lined case and disclosed two small pockets, from one of which projected a letter evidently intended to be posted. Pons removed it without comment. From the other pocket he removed two objects—a thin-paper copy of a letter, and a postcard, unstamped, evidently not meant to be posted, for it bore no address. On one side of the card typescript stood out. The thin paper letter was folded and had evidently not long reposed in the

package, for it was still relatively clean and bore only the wrinkling impress of Captain Walton's knee-stub. The thin-paper letter was clearly a copy of a letter written to the intended recipient of the other letter, which was stamped and enclosed in an envelope, bearing a typescript address "The Rt. Hon. Geoffrey Crayle, M.P., 15 Bourget Street, London S.E." and appeared to come from "John T. Evans, Dungeness Lighthouse, nr. Lydd, Kent."

The envelope contained little more than one page of letter, to judge by its weight. It was slightly longer than the customary envelope, but not of legal size, and its flap was straight, rather than wedge-shaped. Pons examined the envelope perfunctorily, then dropped it to the table before him. He unfolded the thin-paper letter and read it with somewhat more care; it was an ordinary letter of commendation from a constituent to his representative in Parliament, approving the Member's recent stand on a public matter affecting the constituency. He favoured the card with but little more attention. It was a perfectly plain post-card, bearing neither superscription nor address, and carrying but four lines of typescript, which read:

Fifth without fail.
Do not come to us.
We will come to you.
Sailing 10th *Normandie*.

Having finished his cursory examination, Pons looked up.

"Let us just have some hot water ready, Parker," he said to me, and, to our visitor, "Pray continue, Captain Walton."

"Well, sir," began the Captain with deliberation, "as you've heard, I'm a coast dweller, I make a little money beside my pension by carving out driftwood and the like, and I've got Adelaide trained to pick up whatever she can carry and bring it in—that is, beside the fish. A week ago yesterday, that would be the third, she came in with this. I don't get out much, but it was my intention to post the letter just as soon as I got into Lydd, but one thing and another came between, and it was three days before I found time to do it.

"By that time, there had been some queer goings-on. I don't mean to say I was suspicious right off, but someone was about making inquiries concerning me and Adelaide—roundabout, you understand, not so much from me as from my neighbours. Once or

twice I caught a glimpse of sunlight flashing off a spyglass - it's a sight I'm familiar with. So I knew somebody was watching the house."

"This unwelcome attention began when, Captain?" Pons put in. "Before or after the sixth?"

"Four days ago, sir."

"Ah, the seventh. Two days after the 'Fifth without fail.' "

"On the evening of the eighth, I was that suspicious. I put the packet where you saw it, and went off along the coast after drift-wood. While I was gone, someone got into my house and searched it, top to bottom. The only thing missing was the waterproof wrapper in which this packet had been kept dry."

"There was nothing, then, to show that you had not sent off the letter by post?"

"Nothing. But there was more to come. Little things - you might say, innocent things, except that they'd never happened before. Next day somebody came down from Folkestone and made ridiculous inquiries about Adelaide. Did I have a fishing licence for her? And the like. A strange, dark man, square of face - looked like a police-officer. Did I want to sell my house, with all in it? On the eighth, someone shot at her - tipped her wing, he did. That was enough for me, Mr. Pons. I came to the conclusion that this packet is the cause of it all, and I asked myself why they couldn't have come direct and said to me they'd lost it and could they have it back? There's something mighty queer about it. If it belonged to Mr. Evans, why was it floating off the lighthouse unless he lost it by accident? If so, he had the right to come after it, if he thought I had it."

"Quite so," agreed Pons.

"I was in two minds about it at first - whether to go to the lighthouse or to the police. But the police are suspicious and apt to be troublesome, and Mr. Evans has been unfriendly - to say the least - keeping to himself. So I recollected you'd done a bit of work for Miss Norton and she'd spoken highly of you; so here I am. Now, sir, if I can just leave this with you, I'll be on my way back."

"Let us not be hasty, Captain Walton," cautioned Pons.

Our visitor looked inquiringly at Pons, as my companion got to his feet and took a turn or two about the room, his face a study. He walked over to the windows and back, paused a few moments at the mantel, where he flipped through two or three letters transfixed to

it by his knife, and stood for a time before the fire, his keen eyes thoughtful, his brow furrowed, his lips pushing out and in, his hands clasped behind his back. He turned finally to Captain Walton.

"There is nothing demanding your presence at home?" he asked.

"Well, nought—save that I'm not over-fond of the city."

"I suggest then that you spend a few days in London."

"Eh? And what for, Mr. Pons?"

"It doesn't occur to you that it may be dangerous to return home just now?"

"I'm not unused to danger, Mr. Pons," said our visitor stoutly.

"Quite so. Let us say until you hear from me, then. I'll just give you a letter to the keeper of a boarding-house not far from here. We may find it necessary to run down to Dungeness ourselves; if so, we can all go together."

Pons himself saw our visitor and his cormorant down the stairs. He came bounding back into the room, rubbing his hands together in a highly pleased manner.

"Now, then, Parker," said he as he seated himself before the objects our visitor had left behind, "what do you make of it?"

"I have never known your hunger for new adventure to overcome your judgment," I answered. "There's hardly any mystery here. Evans simply dropped his wallet overboard on his way to post his letter. . . ."

"Conveniently wrapped in a cork-lined container, to make sure it floated," interposed Pons.

"And the bird recovered it before he could do so," I finished doggedly. "I must say, Pons, you have a distressing tendency to make mystery where none exists, but I suppose that is only to be expected."

"Let me see," mused Pons, "you have been with me over twelve years, and in all that time it is only one of my cases which turned up something more—more, mind you, not less—than a mystery. And that, let me prod your memory, was the matter of Mr. Amos Dorrington's inheritance—you've been dancing attendance on his lovely daughter, Miss Constance, ever since."

"Nevertheless," I persisted, "I maintain if we ask Evans at the lighthouse, he will confirm my theory."

"Would it not be to his interest to do so? I should assume so." Pons shook his head. "But this discussion is purely academic, for I

am very much afraid Mr. Evans is in no position to be asked any questions whatsoever."

"Why do you say so?"

"Unless I am very badly mistaken, Mr. Evans is dead," said Pons, with the same imperturbability he might have assumed were he ordering an egg for breakfast from our landlady.

"Pons, you are mad!" I exclaimed indignantly.

Pons clucked with growing impatience. "You have a disconcerting tendency to turn yourself into an alienist the moment your pet theory is challenged," he said. "I submit to some unwillingness always to abandon the obvious conclusion, but in this case yours is far from obvious. Let us just look into the matter a little more closely, setting aside the peculiar harassment to which Captain Walton and his cormorant have been subjected. I submit that it would hardly be logical for Mr. Evans to carry about with him at the same time both a letter to be posted and the duplicate copy of that letter."

"Of course not. He would file the duplicate."

"Precisely."

"But, hold on, Pons!" I protested. "Aren't you jumping to conclusions? We have no evidence to show that the thin-paper copy is a duplicate of the letter enclosed in the envelope."

"Except the fact that it is there in the same packet—as if to make sure Mr. Evans knew what he had written his M.P."

"You suggest that Mr. Evans is not the author of the letter purporting to come from him?"

"I do, indeed. I submit he never saw it, and thus needed to have the duplicate so that he might know what he had supposedly written."

"My dear fellow," I said, not without scorn, "if ever I have read an innocuous letter, it is that duplicate copy. It isn't even such a letter of which a copy is necessary!"

"Except, of course, for the most cursory preference as to what it contained." He glanced over toward the burner. "But let us just settle the point without further delay. We have ample steam up."

So saying, Pons rose and carried the letter to the steaming kettle, where he held its sealed flap over the steam. He hummed a little tune as he stood there, a particularly obnoxious practise I inevitably found all the more so when he was at his most recalcitrant in the face of my opposing views.

In a few moments he returned with the open envelope in one hand and the unfolded letter in the other. He put the letter down before me without comment. It was indeed the same in content as the thin-paper duplicate. Pons's interest, however, was not in the letter, but in the envelope.

"I fancy this is the reason for Captain Walton's harassment," said Pons, indicating the back of the open envelope.

He placed it face downward on the table. At first I could see nothing, but presently I realized that the line of sealing gum on the envelope was slightly raised. Even as I noticed it, Pons had unclasped his pocket-knife, prepared to operate on the envelope. In a trice, he was furling back a very thin strip of cellophane and disclosing an even thinner dark line beneath. It was this Pons drew forth with an exclamation of triumph.

"But what is it?" I cried.

"Coded data," answered Pons. "There are several coastal fortifications in that area, are there not?"

"But exactly where?"

"That, I daresay, is somewhat more in my brother's department than in my own. At this hour he should still be on his private line at the Foreign Office."

When he returned from the telephone, it was with word that Bancroft Pons, a most enigmatic individual whose connection with the Foreign Office was of such a pervasive and inclusive nature that one could never guess at the importance of his post, save to conclude that it was of the greatest significance, was soon to join us.

"Now, then," continued Pons imperturbably, turning once more to the contents of our recent visitor's curious packet, "doubtless you have already arrived at the conclusion that this packet—like others of a similar nature—was dropped into the sea, very possibly from passing aircraft or a ship, for Mr. Evans to find, save that in this case Adelaide's vigilance was greater than Evans's own."

"But is not that an absurdly roundabout procedure?" I protested.

"In espionage nothing is too roundabout, my dear Parker, especially if it comes from abroad—from France, perhaps?"

"But France is an ally!"

"Exactly."

"Even if our country needed information it could not obtain by regular channels, there would be other alternatives open to it."

Pons smiled patiently. "It suggests nothing to you that Mr. Evans

transmits such letters as these to a politician in London, and receives duplicate copies of his letters with the originals?"

"Perhaps the letter is in cipher?"

Pons shook his head. "I thought of that at once. There is a poorly concealed message contained on the card, in addition to what the card conveys—that this letter must be delivered by the fifth and that by the tenth emissaries will act on its behalf. The so-called sailing date is nothing more or less than a time-limit, surely, since no such liner as the *Normandie* is scheduled to sail from any known port, as you will find if you take the trouble to scan the ships' registries. And, since today is the eleventh, the time limit has expired, and the warning must be put into effect."

"What warning?"

Pons tossed the card over to me. "That contained in the line-end syllables of this apparently innocent message."

I looked at the card again and read the four line end syllables:

fail us you die

"I submit," said Pons, "it is not too much to assume that the threat so plainly set forth may already have been executed."

"Great Heavens, man! Why are you sitting here idly then?" I cried out.

"Because Mr. Evans is the merest cog in the machine. No, our quarry is somewhere in London. All we can do in that matter of Mr. Evans is to run down to Dungeness in the morning and make such inquiry as is possible, and perhaps at the same time notify the local police. If by some chance Evans is still alive, he can be taken readily enough when he is wanted."

"You are taking a singularly cold-blooded view of the matter. It is unlike you, Pons."

"Say not so," replied Pons, unmoved. "I fear any concern over Mr. Evans at this late date is ill-ventured. Let us rather attend to those more immediate aspects of the matter which may affect the welfare of our country. We must now wait upon Bancroft's coming."

My companion's elder brother made his appearance within an hour, coming soundlessly up the stairs and into the room almost before Pons seemed aware of his approach.

"How now, Solar?" he asked quietly from the threshold, his broad shoulders and massive, leonine head filling the doorway. "What troubles you to the extent of sending for me?"

"This," said Pons, tapping the strip of coded material.

Bancroft came forward with his cat-like tread, took up the paper, and held it to the light. His face paled.

"If you had known what these were, you would not have sent for me," said Bancroft Pons. "Coded formulae relating to defence."

"Elementary, my dear brother," answered Pons. "Fortifications of some kind? On our own coast or in France, I should assume."

"This coded material relates to interior details - and important secret interiors - of the Maginot Line fortifications," said Bancroft. "How came they here?"

Without a word, Pons indicated the hiding place of the coded material. Keeping to his feet, Bancroft slipped his walking-stick under one arm, took up the letter and the envelope, and subjected both to rapid, intense scrutiny.

"The Honourable Geoffrey Crayle would seem to be of primary interest," said Pons, "since the material was addressed to him."

"Tut, tut, let us not jump to unwarranted conclusions, Solar," reprimanded Bancroft. "Say rather the letter and the envelope were addressed to him."

"Ah, then he is a man of impeccable character."

"Unimpeachable."

"Married?"

"A bachelor."

"No longer young?"

"Sixty-seven."

"He lives alone?"

"With a housekeeper."

"Dear me, how well informed you are about our politicians!" said Pons.

"It is only a trifling part of my obligations to His Majesty's Government. Now, then, what of this fellow Evans?"

"I will make some inquiry in the morning. Otherwise, I leave him to you."

"He could not have been the writer, obviously. Merely an agent, then. The letter - and perhaps others before it - must have come from France, and it must be intended for German agents - possibly Russian - in London. How did it come to hand?"

My companion narrated rapidly and succinctly the circumstances of Captain Andrew Walton's visit.

"A cormorant," mused Bancroft. "By what humble phenomena of nature are the best laid plans of men betrayed! I apologize to Mr Burns, Adelaide, indeed! Where are they now?"

"In London, pending disposal of the matter."

Bancroft appeared to muse for a moment. Then he touched the letter with one finger. "This letter?"

"I may have use for it. Take the code; I shall not need that."

"What do you expect to do?"

"First, to ascertain how these messages, addressed to an elected servant of His Majesty, a servant who is above reproach, could fall into the hands of a potential enemy of France and therefore, also, England. Secondly, to rid the country of him, since I am not sanguine enough to believe that our own government in its merciful tenderness would move so boldly as to strike down the whole body of them for it is manifestly only a small segment of an espionage ring upon which we have unwittingly stumbled here. Our French allies are less circumspect in these matters, and not so prone to respect the claims of diplomatic immunity."

Bancroft Pons wrinkled his nose in almost haughty distaste. He carefully pocketed the scrap of paper, and stepped soundlessly to the threshold once more. "You have my number. Call on me if you need our help."

After his brother had gone, Pons sat for some time with his head sunk upon his breast, his eyes closed, his fingers tented before him. He offered nothing more by way of explanation, nor did I venture to ask, for fear that his replies would confuse me the more.

Early next morning found us on our way to New Romney, bound for the Dungeness lighthouse, a journey of a little over an hour by rail from Charing Cross, leading through the beautiful Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells countryside to the region of the Cinque Ports. But throughout our journey, Pons was too preoccupied to look beyond the floor and walls of our compartment. Convinced as he was that our journey would gain him nothing but the verification of his deductions of the evening before, he sat in deep thought, with his eyes half-closed and his head lowered.

Once at New Romney, we changed to the carriages of the quaint miniature railway which runs to Dungeness from that ancient town, a short journey to the tip of the spit of land which points to the lighthouse, a desolate area, with the wide Denge Marsh reaching inland to Lydd and back toward New Romney. Dungeness itself presented its customary isolation— one of pubs and fishermen and their little houses, dominated by the lighthouse. We walked across the banks of coarse brown shingle that looked like a reflection of

the sea, to where the stubby finger of the lighthouse reared from the pebbles, and there we found the keeper, a bushy-bearded old fellow named Elijah Moorehead.

"Evans!" he exclaimed in response to Pons's query. "So you came to ask me about Evans! A strange thing he should be missing."

"Ah," murmured Pons. "How long has he been gone?"

"Two days, Mr. Pons."

Pons glanced significantly at me, while Moorehead continued.

"He set out in his boat—he was as much at home in it as he was here—and he has not returned. The boat has drifted to shore, capsized. I've reported him missing to the authorities."

"Quite right, Moorehead. You say he was much in his boat. Was he not bound to his duties here?"

"Oh, yes, sir. But he had more freedom than I liked. We were much troubled with aeroplanes flying too close, and he had devised some sort of chain of red flares on buoys to be made visible even in the dense fogs which plague us here in winter. So he was much about looking after them. Still, he was an able hand in his boat."

"What was his destination when he left here?"

"I believe he was going down the coast to meet a friend." Moorehead's eyes narrowed. "You don't think, Mr. Pons, he may have met with foul play?"

"We shall see in good time," replied Pons. "I suggest that in any event you keep his things as they were, in case the police should want to look in."

"Perhaps you'd like to see his room, sir?"

Pons accepted the lighthouse keeper's invitation with alacrity.

Evans's room, however, was singularly bare. Pons turned up only a neat packet of duplicate letters, eleven in number, which had been sent to the Right Honourable Geoffrey Crayle over a period of three months, but he did not disturb them.

"I should venture to guess," he said when at last we were on our way back to London, "that the extremely chancey method of delivering messages to Evans originated with him, and that he had some difficulty convincing his confederates of the feasibility of his plan. Hence his vigilance in the face of their temper—a vigilance which Captain Walton's trained cormorant happily foiled."

When I woke the following morning, I found myself alone.

Pons had not gone, however, without leaving cryptic word for me. Pinned to the tablecloth beside my breakfast plate was a short

cutting from one of the morning papers. In sum, it set forth that the body of John T. Evans, employed at the Dungeness Lighthouse, had been found along the shore in the vicinity of the long beach at Dungeness. He had been drowned, and his death was presumed to be an accident.

When I returned past midday from my round of medical calls, I found Pons just back. He was divesting himself of garb I should have thought belonged more properly on a street-hawker.

"Your message didn't escape me," I said. "No doubt you have already corrected the local verdict?"

"On the contrary," said Pons. "Mr. Evans has got his just desserts. He dealt with engaging employers, some of whom alas! are untouchable through ordinary legal channels."

"Are diplomats forever immune?" I cried.

He nodded. "You have chronicled. I think, one or two of my little encounters with that sinister arch-criminal, the Baron Ennesfred von Kroll."

"Not he again!"

"I fear his hand in this is all too evident. Does it surprise you to learn that the house at number 17 Bourget Street is occupied by one Herman Albert Hauptmann, in the German government service?"

"Why, that's next door to Crayle's home."

"That is no coincidence, Parker. Moreover, Mr. Hauptmann has certain connections in Germany—he is married to a niece of Baron von Kroll. Further, he has a young son of tender years; he is nine. His name is Otto. Little Otto is an enterprising lad much given to philately. Every day he collects the discarded envelopes—'covers,' they are called by philatelists—from the houses of all the neighbours. However unwittingly, little Otto thus serves the Vaterland. Need one be told how lovingly his father assists him at his hobby—carefully steaming off stamps, the while ungumming a flap or two?"

"I was about this morning as a tradesman, and the M.P.'s elderly housekeeper, who is evidently as kind-hearted as he himself is reputed to be, turned out to be a veritable encyclopedia of information about all the neighbours. I submit that the intelligence gathered through Hauptmann's system of espionage finds its way directly to Baron von Kroll, and from him in the diplomatic pouches to Germany. There may be other Evanses in the chain, though I am inclined to doubt it, since the loss of any one link

would then break and endanger the entire network. The actual spy is somewhere in France, with access to the means of bringing his information unchallenged across the channel. Could anything be safer than a constituent's letter to his M.P.? These Germans have the guileless minds of children."

Once again in his dressing gown, with a pipe of shag between his lips, my companion sat before the envelope and letter intended for Geoffrey Crayle, M.P.

"Let us just see what we can put together," he said. "We shall send along the Member's letter, but with a little something else in place of the code."

He cut out a thin strip of cellophane, and, as I watched, he pricked into it, by means of a pin, this message:

Komm schnell oder Alles ist verloren.

This he gummed to the envelope in place of the original material, then sealed the envelope. He put the envelope into the rack for the outgoing post and leaned back, a satisfied smile on his face.

"As soon as this reaches Herr Hauptmann, it will be safe for Captain Walton and his Adelaide to return to Kent. Meanwhile, a cautionary word to Scotland Yard, to make sure that our man is followed in his flight from London, and another to the Sûreté, ought to insure a little round of trouble for Hauptmann and his French counterpart away from our own shores at the hands of a government appreciably less sensitive about the rights of espionage agents. We cannot capture Baron von Kroll, but he and I will meet again!"

Within the week, Captain Walton's dog-cart, with Adelaide perched sedately in her crate, ready for the journey back to the southeast coast, was at the kerb before Number 7. He had come back not only at Pons's invitation but also to make a token payment to Pons for his efforts on behalf of Adelaide and the cork-lined packet. On the previous day, Captain Walton and his bird had gone up to a certain stream in Hertfordshire; Adelaide had not been idle; she had caught Pons a dozen fat bream.

The morning papers had just come in, and Pons showed Captain Walton the conclusion of his adventure, chronicled therein under the heading: *German Spy Ring Uncovered*, which was, said Pons, somewhat "inaccurate, owing more to the enthusiasm of Scotland

Yard than to the press." It set forth the dramatic shadowing of a spy from London to a meeting with a confederate in Paris, and the subsequent death of the French spy and capture of Hauptmann in a battle with the French police.

"But it says here, 'By means of close co-operation between Scotland Yard and the French Sûreté'" said Captain Walton. "Not a word about you, Mr. Pons."

Pons smiled. "Ah, that, Captain Walton, is like Adelaide's discovery of the cork-lined packet — one of life's little ironies."

The Adventure of the Camberwell Beauty

FOR SOME TIME after my marriage, I had not seen my friend, Solar Pons, the consulting detective. My practise in South Norwood kept me busy, and Pons himself had been on the move in the south of France. I was not even aware that he had returned to London when, one night in May of the year 1933, I received a tantalizing message from my old friend, inviting me to spend the night and perhaps the following day, accompanying him on one of those adventures of which I never tired during those happy years I had shared quarters with him at 7B Praed Street.

My wife, the most understanding of women, would hear of nothing but that I go forthwith; I had an assistant who could undertake my practise for so short a time, and I was eager to go, for, truth to tell, I had sorely missed the excitement of the game afoot. It was just past ten o'clock when I presented myself at our old quarters, where I found Pons sawing away at a tuneless melody on his violin.

"I fancy the veriest tyro at Scotland Yard would have recognized that familiar tread on the stairs, Parker. I trust you have left Mrs. Parker well. Remember to give her my regards when you return to that little island of domesticity."

To step into that cosily lit room once again was like walking into yesterday. Nothing had changed. Pons's shag was still in the toe of his bedroom slipper tacked to the right of the fireplace; letters and messages were stuck to the mantelpiece by a jack-knife; the large gasogene stood as always on the mahogany sideboard, together with a bottle of Beaune and the decanter. Pons's Inverness and deer stalker hung on a peg behind the door, where, it seemed but a few hours ago, my silk hat and overcoat had also hung.

"I must say, your violin playing has not improved, Pons."

"Quite possibly that is true. Let us see how your faculty of observation has developed during the interim." He stood his violin in a corner near his chemistry table, and came around to the mantel, from which he detached a letter which he thrust toward me. "What do you make of that, Parker?"

I read the communication with keen interest. It was written in a

fine hand, in spidery script, on very thin, but expensive paper. There was no superscription save the date, which was today's, and the message itself was curiously presented:

"You will honour my house if you will be so kind as to accompany my emissary when he presents himself tonight at eleven. There is a concern of some delicacy in which I beg to be served by your unique abilities." The signature was a single initial: "F."

I looked up. Pons's eyes were fixed on me in anticipation.

"It is clear you know the writer."

"Elementary. What of the writer?"

"The richness of the paper suggests he is a man of means," I ventured.

"Capitall Proceed."

"He is accustomed to giving orders and being obeyed."

Pons nodded.

"The script is that of a man advanced in years."

A little smile played about Pons's lips. "I congratulate you, Parker! Plainly, married life has sharpened your wits and increased your faculty for observation. Tell me, does not the manner strike you as strange?"

"It's different, yes."

"Oriental?"

"Now that you mention it, yes. But you know the man."

"I do." Pons sank into his armchair, stretched his long legs toward the coal-scuttle, and stuck his hands into the pockets of his dressing-gown.

"Who is he?"

"Let us refer to him simply as the Doctor. He is considered by some persons a financial genius, by others as the most sinister man in the complex underworld of London. He was once of singular service to me; it is not too much to say that he was instrumental in saving my life. You may recall that little matter of the Seven Sisters. I am thus in his debt."

"Is he a criminal?"

"He has never been convicted. He has never been tried. Yet he is the head of one of the most skillfully organized bands of—shall we say, secret agents?—in all London. He has, conservatively speaking, a thousand men at his disposal."

"Yet he calls on you?" I demanded incredulously.

"Which suggests that the matter is intimately personal and not

something to be entrusted to the lascars, dacoits, thugs, and assorted servants at his command."

"I don't like the sound of this, Pons."

"Ah, you are as thin-skinned as ever!" He chuckled. "Have you ever heard of the Si-Fan?"

"Indeed I have!"

"That amazing web-work of mysterious forces which, legend has it, is represented in every corner of the earth!" He chuckled again. "And the Brotherhood of the Lotus? And the much-touted Yellow Peril?" He smiled, waiting for the full effect of the images he had conjured up to strike me, and then added, "The Doctor is all of them. It is he who is the embodiment of the Yellow Peril; it is he who is the insidious master-mind of the Si-Fan and the Brotherhood of the Lotus. . . ."

"You are leading me up the garden path, Pons!"

"Have it so, if you like."

He took out his watch and peered intently at it. "It lacks but two minutes of the hour. The Doctor's man will be prompt. Presumably, since the Doctor moves silently and unseen, he may be expected to do likewise." He cocked his head suddenly, and listened.

A cat-like step whispered along the stairs.

"He is coming," said Pons. "A light man who walks with a slight limp."

In a moment there was a discreet tap on the door.

Since I was nearer the door, I threw it open. There stood revealed not a sinister Oriental, but a slender, pale-faced young man, whose glance drove past me to fix on my companion.

"Mr. Solar Pons," he said in a pleasant, business-like voice. "I am Wayland Peters. You are expecting me."

"Come in, come in, Mr. Peters. How did you leave the Doctor?"

"In good health, if in bad spirits. You are to come with me. Is Dr. Parker accompanying us?"

"I have asked him to," said Pons. He removed his dressing-gown and slippers, and looked at our client's representative with frank interest. "An honours graduate at Oxford, I see. What year?"

"Two years ago, Mr. Pons."

"You are too young to have seen service in the last war. Perhaps you sustained your wound in Colonial service?"

"I had one year in India. My wound ended my service."

"Left-handed, I see."

"Yes, sir."

"The Doctor apparently disdains the typewriter even for your use. He keeps you in pen and pencil?"

"Yes, sir." A smile broke upon that pale, studious countenance, and I saw that Peters was not ill-favoured in looks. Allowing him a year's military service, four years at Oxford, two years since graduation, he would have been somewhere between twenty five and thirty years of age.

"The Doctor told me to expect something in the way of an exercise in ratiocination, Mr. Pons," he said. "I am not disappointed. But aren't these relatively elementary deductions for you?"

"*Touché*!" exclaimed Pons. "You have fallen victim to the exaggeration of my poor powers of which my companion is incessantly guilty. You are right. These matters are always elementary. They consist primarily in the presentation of conclusions without the exposure of the steps between observation and conclusion, and thus seem always remarkable, though, on examination, they cannot fail but impress one with their simplicity. But is not all such ratiocination solely the application of a little logic to the available evidence? Thus, it is easy to see that you are left-handed and given to the use of a pen; the callus is on the knuckle of the middle finger of the left hand. It is only a little less so to say that you are unmarried, you are a young man fond of his personal comfort, and one not overly burdened with scruples; though you wear a certain aspect of deference well, you are anything but obsequious; you have considerably more ambition than most young men of your age and you mean to get ahead."

Our visitor's smile had faded and vanished, but the twinkle in his pale blue eyes had not. "I'm not sure I follow you in all this, but some of it is the purest venturing," he said.

"Say rather it is what follows naturally in the circumstances of your employment. Let us be off."

Peters had come by limousine. A long, sleek Daimler stood at the kerb. It was not until Pons and I had entered it that I saw how well its occupants were protected from the gaze of passers-by; the back seat was completely shut off from the street by dark curtains drawn tightly across the windows; not a glimmer of light penetrated the interior. A wave of alarm swept over me.

Pons sensed my perturbation and reassured me. "Pray do not be alarmed at the Doctor's precautions, Parker. Whatever legends

have accrued to him, whatever may be whispered about the terrible and weird vengeance which has befallen his enemies, the Doctor is a man of his word. He has never broken it."

"This man could take us anywhere," I protested presently. "I know we turned east, and I thought south, but I have since lost all sense of direction."

"He'll take us directly to the Doctor, never fear. It would be as much as his life is worth to disobey."

"What manner of man is this Doctor?" I cried.

"It is hardly within my province to judge," replied Pons dryly. "I am in his debt. He has not crossed my path; I have had no occasion to cross his. I do not view with equanimity ever doing so."

We drove, I thought, interminably. The car moved smoothly, almost noiselessly along. The hour was now close to midnight. Pons sat in silence; so dark was the car's interior that I could not see him.

"Do you have any idea where we are?" I asked him presently.

"I fancy we are approaching Limehouse. The air has changed subtly, its humidity has increased, and there is that characteristic aroma of the Thames. There is always a distinctive odour about the Docks. And those bells in the distance are surely those of Bow. I daresay we haven't far to go."

Within a few minutes the car slowed to a stop. The door opened under Peters's hand.

I do not know what I expected to see, but certainly it was not what I saw. We descended before a ramshackle wooden building shrouded in darkness. It shone faintly in the glow of a wan street light some distance away. It was one of a tightly packed row of buildings, all of which appeared to need painting badly; indeed, our goal seemed never to have been painted at all. Once we were out of the car, the Daimler slid noiselessly away and vanished into the mists which were extending long fingers into the street.

Peters led the way to the door and opened it with a key. Producing a dark lantern, he pushed his way into the place, which was apparently a kind of Chinese food-shop. He walked directly through the premises to the far wall. There he pressed upon something; a section of the wall fell away. He unshuttered his lantern somewhat more, revealing a hallway devoid of all ornamentation. Its walls had never known paint; cobwebs hung seemingly undisturbed for years; dust lay heavily everywhere.

Peters walked the length of the corridor and disclosed another panel opening on a short flight of stairs which led down. Since Pons

followed without hesitation, I did likewise. We were soon wandering in a tortuous maze, out of which I questioned whether even Pons would have found his way.

"I suppose this secluded gentleman restores the cobwebs and dust after someone passes through," I whispered to Pons with some sarcasm.

"Nothing is beyond him, Parker. I do not doubt it."

After what seemed an endless walk through the maze of corridors and tunnels, we came into what was more substantial construction. Soon we found ourselves walking on carpets, and presently we were ushered into a fantastically luxurious room. The floor was completely covered with a thick Persian rug; the walls were hung with what struck me as priceless Oriental draperies; the spare furnishings were opulent. But the appointments of that room were completely eclipsed by its occupant.

Facing us in the pale green glow of a shaded lamp stood the tallest Chinese I had ever seen. He was thin and very old, and his tallness was such that his shoulders were slightly hunched, as if he were conscious of his height, so unusual among his countrymen. Even more remarkable was the inquiring face turned upon us. It was yellow in colour, and the lustrous, hypnotic eyes which looked in our direction were green, a kind of smoky green. The head was domed, with but a few wisps of hair in an uncut tonsure, and his body was cloaked in Mandarin robes of singular richness. About his feet scampered a marmoset which, with a shrill whistling sound, ran up the Doctor's robe and came to rest on his shoulder, where it sought its master's ear and made a succession of muted sounds.

"It is good of you to come, Mr. Pons," said the Doctor. "You have brought Dr. Parker, I see. I am not surprised."

Peters stood waiting for a gesture of dismissal which did not come.

"You will stay," said the Doctor, scarcely looking at the emissary he had sent. "It will be necessary for Mr. Pons to talk with you." He turned once again to Pons and stretched forth a claw-like hand with incredibly long fingers on which gleamed and shone Oriental rings of unusual splendour, and yet in excellent taste. "Pray be seated, gentlemen."

He himself sat down. Sitting, he made as impressive a figure as he had on his feet. The light revealed him more clearly and betrayed that the old man's thin, austere face, at the moment so friendly, could be transformed in a wink of an eye into a visage of



sinister menace and malefic power. His eyes, I saw now, were not smoky, but filmed, and possessed a cat-like viridescence.

"You doubtless wonder that I've sent for you," he continued, speaking directly to Pons.

"I assumed the matter must be one of pressing personal concern, or it could have been dealt with in your customary manner."

A spectral smile briefly touched the Doctor's lips. Then he inclined his head a little, as if to acknowledge a compliment. He went on.

"Only a matter of such intimacy would have brought about this visit, Mr. Pons. Let me see, is it not three years since our last encounter? I believe it is. You may not have known at that time that I have had for many years a ward, who goes by the name of Karah, though her real name is Cecily Kennet. She was the daughter of Sir Cecil Kennet, who was in the Consular service in Rangoon for some time, and of a woman who was very dear to me, an Eurasian with whom Sir Cecil lived. I need hardly say I have kept Karah severely apart from my way of life, save for rare visits. She has been raised in Rangoon, and came to England for her education. She was privately tutored and attended a small college, privately endowed, in Oxford, from which she was graduated with high honours two years ago. Since then she has lived a secluded life in a house in Camberwell, though her rare appearances have excited undesirable comments on the part of certain columnists who have seen her and commented on her beauty. Last night, Mr. Pons, Karah disappeared.

"The circumstances of her disappearance are these. Karah reaches me by means of a private telephone number. She informs me that she wishes to see me, and Peters is sent to bring her here. Sometimes she comes by car, sometimes by boat from London Bridge, for the principal entrance to these quarters is on the Thames. Last night she came by car. Her purpose was to take up a private matter in which I had already given my decision. The matter in question does not concern us here. She pleaded with me to alter my decision; I did not do so. She resigned herself and made ready to return home.

"Since the night was unusually fine, she expressed the wish to return by boat to London Bridge. Peters was sent to the bridge with the car, and Karah was given in charge of Ah Sen, an old faithful retainer. Peters will tell you what happened."

He nodded to Peters, who began at once to speak. "I took the car

around to the bridge, got out, and went down to the landing. It was quite late, almost midnight. There was no one to be seen. That wasn't unusual. When the boat came, Ah Sen helped Karah out. Just as they were getting out of the boat, I thought I heard someone in the shadows between us and the car. I immediately asked Ah Sen to accompany us to the car.

"Just prior to reaching the car, I saw someone standing in deep shadow, evidently waiting for us to come on. I called Ah Sen's attention to him, but just as I did so, we heard a strange whistling sound, something struck Ah Sen, and he went down. Within a few seconds, it was my turn. I had seen no one except the stranger in the shadows; I had felt no one nearby. When Ki Ling, the coxswain of the launch, became suspicious at Ah Sen's absence, he followed and found us lying unconscious. Karah had vanished."

Peters finished, but Pons did not immediately question him. He sat for a few moments, slouched down in his chair, in contrast to the Doctor, with his fingertips in the familiar Gothic arch before his lips.

"You spoke of a boat and coxswain," he said presently. "It was a motorboat?"

"A launch, similar to those used by the river police, Mr. Pons."

"You were struck by something. Can you hazard a guess as to what it was?"

"It seemed to be like a sandbag."

"It could have been thrown?"

"Some of our men are experts at such exercises," answered Peters bluntly. "If ours can do it, so can others."

"You spoke of a whistling sound. What, in your opinion, was its source?"

"Someone signaled."

"By whistle?"

"He made the sound himself. I couldn't say that it was either by lips or an instrument."

"This arrangement—your meeting the boat at the bridge—was customary?"

"Yes, sir. It has happened many times."

"So that anyone intending to abduct the lady might reasonably be expected to know of it?"

"I'm afraid so, sir."

Perceiving that Pons had finished with Peters, the Doctor tugged

at a bell-rope which hung down one wall. "You will want to speak to Ah Sen, Mr. Pons."

Ah Sen came, almost upon the old man's words. He was an old-fashioned Chinese, for he still wore a pigtail tightly coiled on his head. He walked into the room, his hands in his sleeves, and bowed to our client, who merely waved one hand languidly in Pons's direction, whereupon Ah Sen presented himself to Pons and stood waiting.

"Ah Sen speaks perfect English, Mr. Pons," said the Doctor.

"Capital!" answered Pons. "My knowledge of Oriental languages is sadly limited. We have heard Mr. Peters's story, Ah Sen. Will you tell us yours?"

Ah Sen obliged by recounting the story Peters had told us.

"Did you see the man in the shadows?"

Ah Sen hesitated. "Not exactly, sir. I was just turning to look at him when I was struck. Mr. Peters was struck directly after."

"You heard the whistle described by Mr. Peters. What sort of whistle would you say it was?"

"It was a low whistle made by mouth. I believe it was a signal."

"Could the man in the shadows have made it?"

"No, sir. The whistle came from the other side, from behind Peters."

"How long were you unconscious?"

"Perhaps five minutes. We were roused by Ki Ling."

"There was mist, perhaps fog, at the bridge?" ventured Pons.

"Yes, sir. Generally so along the river."

Pons turned to the Doctor. "So you were informed at once, Doctor? And doubtless without delay all that vast machinery which you direct was set in motion."

Once again a little smile touched our client's lips. "Yes, Mr. Pons. London was literally turned inside out. I need hardly tell you there is not a nook or cranny of the city with which some of us are not familiar. And we have means of obtaining information which are not at the disposal of the Metropolitan Police or Scotland Yard. Our efforts were not entirely without results. But those results I find most troubling. They have not discovered Karah, and but very little trace of her. Yet what has been discovered is suggestive.

"You are doubtless fully aware that my enterprises are limited neither by city nor country; they are international in scope. However modest, or however widespread, they generate rivalry. In

this country, in certain enterprises which shall be nameless to spare you any of those qualms of conscience to which Britons are so abnormally susceptible, I have no greater rival than Baron Alfred Corvus, known in the underworld by the name of 'Old Crow.' This man, a veteran of the war, in which he lost a limb, is almost as retiring as I am; he wears a wooden peg, which is a point of some significance, and he is as unscrupulous as the members of my organization. He will, in short, stop at nothing.

"At the moment we are engaged in a desperate struggle for control of a certain aspect of the enterprise which excites our mutual interest. He lives in a secluded villa on the banks of the Thames at Teddington. Mr. Pons, our first trace of Karah was at Lambeth Bridge; she had been taken aboard a boat there. The boat was evidently waiting there under instructions, and the moment she was aboard, it sped upstream. Our second trace was along the bank of the Thames behind the gardens of Baron Corvus's villa. There were traces of three persons—two men, one of whom wore a wooden leg, one woman, whose footprints suggest those of Karah.

"I would have proceeded against Baron Corvus without delay had it not been that I must first assure myself of Karah's safety. Thus far I have received no communication from Baron Corvus; I expected none so soon; he will wait until the right hour to present his demands, that hour when he believes I have no alternative but to surrender to him. Mr. Pons, I am not entirely the inhuman monster I have been depicted, I am capable of human emotions, and I love Karah as were she my own daughter. I want you to find her, to rescue her before she can come to harm. You may name any fee you like, within or beyond reason. I do not expect you to cross swords with Baron Corvus. My lascars and dacoits will deal with him. I want you to see a likeness of Karah before you begin searching for her."

The Doctor signaled to Peters, who went over to one of the wall hangings and drew it aside by means of a rope which opened the hanging like a curtain. At the same time, he pressed a switch, and a shaft of light came from above to shine on the portrait which the hanging had concealed. It was a portrait by the hand of one of the most eminent British artists, of a remarkably beautiful dark-haired girl with smouldering green blue eyes, a full, sensuous mouth which yet expressed great sensitivity, and a natural charm which the artist had caught on his canvas.

The portrait was full length, meant to be life-size. The artist had skillfully imparted a subtle sense of the mystery which tradition has it is integral in the Orient, as if to symbolize her background. Her cheekbones were high, testifying to her Eurasian origin; her skin seemed to have a lustre. She was not fair, yet she was not dark, rather somewhere between, like a girl overlong in the sun.

"Is she not beautiful?" asked our client.

"Extraordinarily so," agreed Pons.

"Please memorize her features, Mr. Pons."

"I have done so. It would be difficult to forget them."

Our client signaled again, and instantly the light went out, the portrait vanished behind the wall hanging.

"I trust you're prepared to take up the chase without delay. The launch is ready for you. Peters and Ki Ling will take you and Dr. Parker to the grounds of the villa occupied by Baron Corvus."

"I came prepared for any course," answered Pons.

"Good. When you have information for me, you will know how to reach me."

Our client took leave of us as if he had granted audience.

Peters conducted us away from the Doctor's quarters. Once more we entered a maze of passageways, but now our direction was steadily downward, down pairs and trios of steps, down ramps, until at last we came out into the night on the bank of the Thames not far above the West India Docks. There a launch waited with Ki Ling, who was as Western as Ah Sen had been Oriental in appearance.

The hour was now well past midnight. The broad Thames under the ever-moving mists which shrouded it was impressive and beautiful. We swung out into the night-girt river and went up into the city, past moored ships and lesser craft, waiting out the night in spectral silence - barges, sailing-boats with sails furled, sea-going ships all riding the tides. The sound of our engine, though it was muffled, seemed a shattering noise.

Despite the unfamiliarity of our course, I had little difficulty finding our bearings. In but a short time, we passed under the East London Railway bridge; not far beyond came the first of the major bridges, the Tower, and thereafter, in regular succession, London Bridge, Blackfriars, Waterloo, Charing Cross, Westminster, Lambeth, and Vauxhall. It was not until we had gone beyond Putney that I turned to Pons, for by this time we were well up the river, several miles from our place of embarkation.

My companion apparently did not share my uneasiness. He sat with his angular chin cupped in one long-fingered hand; his eyes were half-closed; a ghostly smile lay on his lips. Altogether, his expression was curiously provocative. I glanced at Peters. He was watching me.

"Is it much farther?" I asked.

"Some miles," said Peters.

"You know very well where Teddington is," said Pons. "It is a little less than twenty miles. Say, an hour's journey. If you feel you must rejoin Mrs. Parker, we can let you off at Wandsworth."

"At the moment we seem to be passing Fulham Palace," I said coldly. "We passed Wandsworth some little while ago."

Pons looked toward Peters. "I'm afraid my companion dislikes to think I may be lending my modest abilities to what would seem to be warfare between two agents engaged in a highly dubious and potentially illegal enterprise."

"I quite understand," said Peters, bestowing a nettling glance of sympathy on me.

I said no more, but gave my attention to the river. I was annoyed by Pons's amiable docility before a man like the Doctor, who was admittedly on the left side of the law, though I well knew that Pons would point out with that cold logic of his that his client's present problem was not predicated upon his status in the underworld of London.

Our goal was now soon within easy reach. The launch's taciturn coxswain cut speed and turned toward shore; the noise of our approach was reduced to a muffled throbbing. Close to the shore the engine was entirely cut off. The launch nosed in to the soft bank with scarcely a sound.

The area we were to examine was not far away. Once more Peters's dark-lantern came into play, while Ki Ling stood guard to prevent any surprise from the house beyond the gardens, though it was plain, even in the faintly starlit night, that the villa of Baron Corvus was some distance away, shrouded by trees.

Pons took the dark-lantern from our guide and examined the shore. Imprinted in the soft earth between the river's edge and the thicker lawn which thinned down toward the water was a series of footprints. At least three people had walked there. The prints were of a woman wearing high heeled slippers, a man with a wooden peg for leg, and a third man. Pons crouched with the light flooding the footprints, his glance darting from one to another of them. No one uttered a sound. Pons shut off the light and rose.

"Where can I reach you, Mr. Peters?"

"Perhaps it would be better to set an hour for an appointment."

"Very good. I shall expect to be back in my quarters by six o'clock tonight," said Pons. "It is now almost three in the morning. Dr. Parker and I will carry on from here without you. Pray assure the Doctor that I have every hope of some word for him by late tonight. With your permission, I'll keep your dark-lantern."

Though Peters was somewhat taken aback, he acquiesced in Pons's surprising decision. The Chinese was evidently accustomed to taking orders without question; he was impassive before Pons's wish to go on alone. They returned to the launch and pushed out into the Thames to return the way we had come.

"Pons, this is madness!" I cried.

"Dear me, how readily the diagnosis comes to you," clucked Pons.

"Next thing I suppose you'll want to break into the house!" I went on, disregarding his levity.

"I need hardly ask for what reason. To rescue the fair damsel, of course!"

"What else?" I demanded in exasperation. "Pons, it is surely too great a risk to take."

"Pray be reassured, Parker. I have no intention of storming the house. The girl is not there. If Baron Corvus is everything the Doctor says he is, his villa is surely the last place he would keep Karah. No, I fancy we must look elsewhere for the Doctor's ward. But, come, you saw the footprints. They did not seem to you unusual?"

"In what way?"

"Look again."

Pons directed the light of the dark-lantern to the prints. I examined them with as much care as the circumstances permitted, though I was not without some apprehension lest we be seen from the house and challenged.

"They are precisely what we were led to expect."

Pons's voice was quizzical when he answered. "I cannot determine whether that stems from an intelligent application of the facts, which from you is sheer genius, my dear fellow, or whether it is merely what I had expected. These footprints convey nothing to you?"

"Nothing except that a young woman wearing high heeled slippers, a wooden-legged man, and one other walked here, presumably coming off a boat of some kind," I replied.

"If you look closely, you will observe several instructive points," said Pons. "Does it not seem to you that the print of the wooden leg is unduly uneven? As if its wearer were uncertain?"

"He might well be," I retorted, "if he were carrying the young lady."

"He could hardly have been carrying her if she were on her feet," said Pons dryly. "Moreover, if these two were carrying anything at all, their prints would go far deeper. No, Parker, whoever walked here carried nothing, far less another human being. Do not these prints seem unusually light?"

"The men who made them were not heavy."

"That is a remarkably sage deduction," said my companion with the ghost of laughter in his voice. "The size of the shoe here seems to be not more than eight and a half. That is a small foot for a man, is it not?"

"Well, it is surely below the average."

"The other would appear to be somewhat larger. Yet it is indented no further. And, save for the indentation of the heels, the prints which are presumably Karah's are uniform with the others." He brought the light closer. "Does it not seem to you that the prints have been rained upon?"

"Impossible!" I cried. "Rain has not fallen since the late afternoon of the day before yesterday. Your client's ward was abducted last night."

"Do not these prints suggest anything more to you, Parker? Consider — they are well up from the water's edge."

"Well, that is elementary," I retorted. "The boat came in on the tide."

"Exactly," said Pons dryly. He shut off the dark-lantern. "I daresay we can do no more here. Let us just make our way to the nearest street. Unfortunately, our likelihood of finding a cab at this hour is not too great. But we shall persevere, never fear."

"Pons, this is like looking for a needle in a haystack!" I cried. "The Doctor's agents have already scoured London. Where do you intend to go at this hour?"

"Where every sensible man would want to go," he answered. "To bed. Mrs. Johnson will be delighted to serve you breakfast once again. At daybreak, we can resume our search for the Doctor's ward."

All my expostulations fell on deaf ears. And to my asking to know why, if he meant only to return to 7B Praed Street, he had

dismissed the launch. Pons replied only with his customary, "You know my methods, Parker—you've known them for many years; you need only apply them."

Early morning found us once more on the Thames. Long before I had crawled somewhat tiredly from my bed to face the honest joy of the good, long-suffering lady who had for so long been my landlady as well as Pons's, my companion had arranged for a launch to wait on us at Westminster Bridge. The aspect of the river was totally different by day from the eerie, almost sinister waterway at night, though at both times the Thames flowed along with its own majestic beauty.

I wasted no time asking Pons where he intended to go. I had learned from experience that Pons could be as uncommunicative on the scene as he could be garrulous at the conclusion of a case. Pons himself took the wheel of the launch, and it was soon evident to me that he was retracing our route of the previous night. At the breakfast-table he had been poring over detailed maps of the region from Kew Gardens to Teddington; I would discover in good time where he intended to go.

Pons's goal appeared at first to be the grounds of the Teddington villa of Baron Corvus, but in this I was mistaken, for he turned from the Thames at Kew into the River Brent. We soon found ourselves going through the locks at Brentford. We were now on a stretch of water which was as busy with the movement of boats as the Thames, and Pons reduced the speed of our craft. Here and there were stretches of rushes and weeds, and from time to time the river bore the aspect of a country stream, colourful with the narrow boats so common to British waterways.

Well past Brentford, on the Grand Junction Canal, almost within sight of the Brill's Bridge Junction and the Toll Office, Pons throttled back the engine and lay in close to one bank of the canal.

"Do you not sometimes think that the canals of England are not fully appreciated?" he asked suddenly. "These are friendly waters, and I hold that the little bridges, the locks, the painted boats, as well as the inhabitants of the banks—I have reference principally to our animal friends—possess a charm which is as much the essence of the English countryside as the rolling downs and the green shires."

Doubtless Pons caught sight of the expression of bewilderment which must have reflected my feelings.

"Oh, come, Parker, brace up! I have by no means taken leave of my senses," he said.

"Forgive me," I answered. "I was under the impression that we were searching for the Doctor's ward."

"There is always time for that," said Pons, waving his hand airily. "I have a fancy this bright, sunny morning, to inform myself with the charm of the narrow boats which ply these waters. How better to acquaint oneself with the lesser-known aspects of England? How those lilacs hang over the water there!"

"Well, there's one of the narrow boats now."

"The *Shenton*, is it not? Let us just run into the bank here. I want to board her."

Thereupon Pons suited his actions to his words. There was nothing for it but that Pons must board the *Shenton*, examine her appointments, and while away time in conversation about the craft with the owner and his wife, bluff, hearty people, who were aboard. Moreover, the *Shenton* was but the beginning; thereafter as we proceeded up the canal past the West Drayton Railway station, past the lock and toll office at Cowley, toward Uxbridge Lock, it was the *Nelson*, the *Image*, the *Ivy*, the *Eve*, the *Ganpat*, the *Nottingham*, and at last, past Uxbridge, the *Lapuing*, all of which seemed as alike as peas in a pod, save for their variation in colours, each of their owners seeming to vie with one another for the brightest and sauciest of hues in which to decorate their boats, though most of the narrow-boat people wore the traditional black and green cord of the canal folk.

Pons spent no less than five hours in this diversion. He talked with the men and women of the craft. Sometimes they were husband and wife. On occasion a boy or a girl was on board as well, and on the *Lapuing* Pons spent an unwarranted time prodding a shy, grimy faced young fellow into conversation, provoking him with questions until the captain came along and told Pons his "nevvie" didn't know much about canal boats, having just come aboard two days before. By the time Pons had finished, it was mid-afternoon.

When we were on our way back toward the Thames, I reflected bitterly that Pons was playing a deep game. "No doubt," I said, "you've been conducting an assiduous search for the young lady, and very probably you know precisely where she is."

"I do indeed," he replied soberly. "But no more than you, for you saw her as well."

"I? Surely you are joking!" But, no, Pons would not have jested so. "The pretty girl with the *Ivy*," I guessed.

Pons shook his head. "You are wide of the mark."

"The extra woman on the *Nottingham*."

"You're coming closer, in a sense."

"Ah!" I cried, exasperated. "Of course it was the 'nevvie' on the *Lapwing*. That was where you stopped looking."

"Elementary, my dear Parker!" said Pons, grinning.

"But why didn't you take her?"

"My assignment, I believe, was primarily to find her," said Pons. "I have done so. I was also to 'rescue' her; it did not seem to me that the young lady required that service."

At six o'clock promptly, the Doctor's emissary presented himself at our quarters. Peters came in expectantly in answer to Pons's invitation, and stood waiting near the door.

"And the Doctor—how is he?" asked Pons.

"Anticipating your report."

"I shall have to have his private telephone number, also your keys," said Pons crisply, "so that I can call on him tonight at eleven."

"I'll take you to him, Mr. Pons."

Pons's eyes twinkled. "I rather think not, Mr. Peters. By that time, unless I am very much mistaken, you will be putting a considerable distance between the Doctor and yourself." Pons ignored the expression of perplexity which crossed Peters's face. "Tell me, are you prepared to leave the country? There is a flight from Croydon at nine, I believe. Unless I am in further error, you are very probably ready to leave for America at a moment's notice, together with the young lady who has been the object of your affections, despite the steadfast opposition of her guardian. We left her, by the way, all unsuspecting on the *Lapwing* at Uxbridge."

Peters's face betrayed a gamut of emotions—fear, amazement, and finally the broad smile of pure pleasure. "Mr. Pons, you are indeed a remarkable man," he said.

"On the contrary, my dear young fellow, your trail was as broad as the Thames itself—except," he added with a wry smile, "to those so confounded by the intrigues of London's underworld that the simple escapes them. I mean no disrespect to the Doctor's servants, who are superior in their own devious ways. A little more attention to matters pertinent to the tides and the weather might have made

the footprints near Baron Corvus's villa more convincing. I fear, too, that a wooden leg strapped to your knee hardly permits an expert performance. But come, you will need money. Name any sum you like – I'll add it to my fee when I see the Doctor."

"Must you tell him?"

"I must. I fancy his anger will cool in good time. But until it does, I suggest you have enough respect for his methods to put the ocean between you."

Peters's response was in character. He took his departure immediately, leaving with Pons the Doctor's private telephone number – which my companion duly entered in his files for future reference – his keys, and the Doctor's car at the kerb. He did not wait to learn how Pons had hit upon his trail. My own astonishment, however, brooked no denial.

"The solution devolved upon an old tenet of mine," said Pons. "The success of circumstantial evidence depends wholly upon the correct interpretation. There were several manifest flaws in the evidence offered us. Either Baron Corvus abducted Karah in order to blackmail the Doctor, or he did not. No one seemed to consider that anyone else had carried out the abduction, and the 'clues' had been carefully placed for the Doctor's investigation. But even before we set out up the Thames, one question intruded insistently. If Baron Corvus had abducted Karah, surely there would have been a more opportune time to do so!

"She could have been lured from the house in some manner; her movements might have been watched pending an opportunity to take her from the Camberwell house; the abduction, taking place as it did, almost presupposed some informant in the Doctor's service, or, on the other hand, the most elaborate plans to govern every possibility, since Karah did not follow any invariable course in her way to and from Limehouse. What was most incredible, however, was the supposedly damning factor: if Baron Corvus were the author of the abduction, he himself would certainly not have appeared on or near the scene. So at the outset, it seemed to me apparent that Baron Corvus was completely innocent of complicity in Karah's abduction.

"The Doctor himself offered the key to the situation. He said, if you recall, that Karah's purpose in visiting him was 'to take up a private matter' in which he had already given his decision. She wished him to alter that decision; he did not do so. At his failure to

do so, we may suppose, a plan of Peters's own was put into effect. What that 'private matter' was, I have no doubt. Karah wished to marry Peters. Indeed, Peters's presence in the Doctor's organization was predicated solely upon Karah; he wanted to be near her. They had met at Oxford. Peters told us he was graduated from Oxford two years ago; the Doctor mentioned of his ward that she had attended a smaller college in Oxford, which she had left two years ago.

"So the abduction was not an abduction at all. It was done with Karah's complicity. That alone explained all the relevant factors, and the moment it occurred to me that it was so, the elements of the puzzle fell into place with clockwork precision. The footprints were entirely the work of Peters. They had been put in at high tide a day or two before; the wavering print of the peg was made by someone quite unaccustomed to wearing such an object. The wooden-legged man's footprints, though Peters wore a larger shoe on his free foot to make them, showed the same unevenness as Peters's own prints; so did those of Karah, which Peters made with her shoes—the prints were all made by someone with a limping defect. Peters has a slightly defective leg, as you saw.

"The stage was thus set for the final act. If the Doctor failed to alter his decision, the *Lapwing* was waiting. We had evidence to show that Karah had taken to the river at Lambeth Bridge. She was probably as aware as Peters of how thoroughly the Doctor's men could comb London, of how many petty informants might be at his beck and call. If she left the boat at all, it would necessarily be for some place where she might be reasonably safe. She could have gone either up river or down; manifestly, the risk was too great to go down to the sea, even for some possible berth on a boat there, for the riverfront from Wapping and Limehouse is the Doctor's especial province. It must therefore be up the Thames, and what place more unlikely offered itself than one of the narrow boats common to the canals? Arrangements had unquestionably been made well in advance.

"Once the conflict between the Doctor and Baron Corvus had been joined, Karah and Peters would slip away. The attack at the bridge was simply staged. There was no 'dark shadow' standing there; Ah Sen imagined that he saw it because Peters said it was there. Peters himself made the whistling sound and struck Ah Sen, after which Karah knocked out Peters to divert any suspicion from

him. Thereafter she acted with singular dispatch and went straight to the *Lapwing* by boat. Once there, she became the nephew of the captain and his wife, who were in Peters's pay."

"I shouldn't like to be in Peters's shoes," I said, recalling the malefic menace of our mysterious client.

"Oh, I daresay the Doctor may find it easier to resign himself to Karah's marriage than to her 'abduction' and its possible consequences." Pons smiled. "I rather think our client may not have been without some apprehension of the reason for his ward's disappearance."

"Then why trouble you, Pons?"

"Our Oriental friends set great store on not 'losing face.' The Doctor has a reputation as a swift and implacable avenger. Far better that Peters and Karah should escape me, than that he should be forced to save face at their expense. He is not above either cunning or a sense of humour."

As urgently as I needed to return to my practise, I would not let Pons go alone to that incredible apartment deep in the maze of Limehouse that night. He did not telephone for an appointment until after the flight from Croydon had taken place. He made his way back to the masking shop-front by car without difficulty, and he found his path among the maze of corridors with a facility that chagrined me.

Once more we sat before the sinister and impressive Chinese, who wore simultaneously the hauteur of a man of vastly superior intelligence and the humility of a suppliant at the door of Pons's power of ratiocination.

"You have found Karah, Mr. Pons?" were his first words.

"Found her—and lost her."

"Baron Corvus?"

Pons's eyes challenged his in a long, searching glance. Then he said, "I think you, too, knew that Baron Corvus himself would have had none but the author's part in the abduction of your ward."

Pons told him how he had found Karah, and where she had gone.

"So I lose both of them," said the Doctor with a weary smile.

"They should be happy with each other. Peters has enterprise—the staged footprints were a little, shall we say, naive?—but on the whole, he has vision and ambition. I shall not forgive them, for they

have done nothing to command forgiveness. But may they know this?" He shook his domed head gently from side to side, while his marmoset chattered at his ear. "No, never. It was not good that Karah should be so close to this world of mine. It was not meant for her. Let them go to a new world. I shall miss her grievously, Mr. Pons—but I am content to know this is what is best for her."

He paid Pons's fee without question.

Months later, when I had occasion to call at 7B, I found on the crowded mantel a set of little Chinese ivory and ebony figurines inlaid with jewels of incalculable value, in each of which the letter *F* had been engraved with consummate skill, a further expression of gratitude from the incredible occupant of that secret hideaway in Limehouse.

The Adventure of the Tottenham Werewolf

VERY FEW of the problems which occupied the attention of my friend, Solar Pons, came to him through sources close to him, but at least one of them, the singular adventure of Septimus Grayle, the Tottenham Werewolf, I myself brought to his notice, however unwittingly. During Pons's absence on the Continent one summer, I had got into the habit of taking dinner at the Diogenes Club, and had observed there from time to time a porcine, well-muscled individual of middle age, who made me uncomfortable by the forthright manner in which he examined me. In turn, I found myself wondering about him, and I determined to ask Pons to join me at dinner as soon as he returned from Prague.

Accordingly, one evening I ushered Pons to my table at the Club.

"Ah, we are in luck, Pons," I said. "He is here."

I placed Pons so that he might obtain an excellent view of our fellow-diner in one of the mirrors which reflected the room beyond our table, and the keen grey eyes of my companion fixed upon the reflection in the glass, though his lean face was ostensibly turned toward me. The object of Pons's scrutiny was leisurely engaged in eating his meal, but he had observed our entrance and his expression had unquestionably quickened; yet he had returned to his food with the assurance of a man who knows he will complete his dinner before you and be well on his way before you can take leave of your table. He was somewhat warmly clad this evening, but as always, he bore no evident clues about himself, and I was thus all the more interested in Pons's reaction.

"What do you make of him?" I asked presently.

"There is not much to be said," replied Pons, much to my satisfaction. "Though it is evident by his colour that he is an ex-colonial—Egypt, I should say, if the scarab ring he wears is any indication—that he has not long been back in England, that he is very probably not a member of the Diogenes Club but has a guest card, that he is at present living outside London, since his visits here are periodic compared to yours, which are hardly regular, that he is a man of approximately fifty-five years of age, very clearly

accustomed to administrative work—work, I submit, dealing in a large measure with native labour, that his interest in the Diogenes Club lies in something other than its cuisine, which is not exceptional."

"My dear fellow!" I protested. "I can follow most of your deductions with ease. . . ."

"Dear me! how familiarity does breed contempt," murmured Pons.

"But how in the world do you arrive at the conclusion that his visits here have an ulterior motive?"

"You have not mentioned his interest in anything apart from yourself, Parker. I submit, therefore, that you are the object of his attentions."

"My dear Pons!"

"Because the gentleman has been observing you with a most definite purpose. Consider—he comes in from the country at regular intervals; you do not recall his interest in anyone else."

"You flatter me."

"Ah, do not say so, Parker. I fancy his interest in you is dictated by my absence from London."

"You, Pons!"

"I submit that our fellow-diner sought me some time ago, failed to find me—you will recall that Mrs. Johnson, too, spent these past weeks with her sister in Edinburgh—and then discovered your whereabouts either through the medical directory or by accident. He concluded that my return to London would be marked either by your absence from the Diogenes Club or by my appearance in your company. And now, if I am not mistaken, we shall have corroboration."

Our fellow-diner had finished his dinner, and was now coming to his feet. But instead of leaving the dining-room, he turned purposefully and came over to our table, beside which he stood in a few moments, a short, compact figure, bowing slightly.

"I beg your pardon," he said in a low, husky voice. "I believe I have the privilege of addressing Mr. Solar Pons, the private inquiry agent. I am Octavius Grayle, of Tottenham village, near North allerton in Yorkshire."

"Pray be seated, Mr. Grayle," said Pons. "I believe you know Dr. Parker."

"By sight, yes. I fear I have been making a nuisance of myself by watching for your company. I could rouse no one at 7B Praed

Street; so I concluded that sooner or later Dr. Parker's movements would give me some indication of your whereabouts."

"I have been out of London," said Pons. "But you are not interested in my itinerary."

"I have no doubt that you have already exercised those powers of yours which are so remarkable and correctly concluded that I am an ex-colonial from Egypt, not too long—a year—back in England, and that I am not a member of the Club, but a guest on my brother's card. It is about my brother that I would like to consult you."

"By all means," answered Pons with a mirthful gleam in his eyes. "Your brother is Septimus Grayle. . . ."

"The Tottenham Werewolf," finished our client, for manifestly such he had become. "I am afraid, Mr. Pons," he continued dryly, "that we must concede so much—my brother at least is convinced that he is a werewolf, very probably because he has certain extremely distressing compulsions, the most startling of which is the habit of loping about on all fours on moonlit nights and baying at the moon."

"Incredible!" I cried.

"But you apparently have some familiarity with the case, Mr. Pons," continued Grayle, as if oblivious to my exclamation. "You will then know that in the course of the past year a young man, William Gilton; a girl, Miss Miranda Choate; and our own uncle, Alexander Grayle, have been mysteriously murdered, all discovered with their throats literally torn out. The last death, our uncle's, occurred only a month ago, and now my brother has been placed under what is called 'protective custody.' In short, he has been arrested, he has been all but charged and removed from the house. Mr. Pons, my brother may have the compulsion to believe that he is, and even in part to act like, a werewolf, but he is no murderer."

"What are your brother's circumstances, Mr. Grayle?"

"The three of us—my brother, my sister Regina, and I—live together. Each of us is independently wealthy, in a modest way, of course, and each of us lives rather independently of the other, though my sister and brother have naturally grown closer together during my long absence in Egypt. My brother, I should hasten to add, is aware of his affliction, but he is not more than ordinarily depressed by it from time to time, and he does not permit his knowledge of it to cloud his small pleasures. He is somewhat younger than I am, and our sister is younger than he. It is she who

manages the servants and runs our household. My brother's situation is such that the mere fact of his arrest would precipitate a local scandal of great proportions, since our family is perhaps the oldest in Tottenham and perhaps also the wealthiest. My late uncle was the largest landowner in the county, and his death has been widely chronicled, as you know. It is therefore implicit in the situation that the real murderer must be found. Detective-Sergeant Brinton is dogged and persistent, but he lacks any genuine acumen, and the county police are far more accustomed to dealing with traffic-regulations infringements than with matters of this kind. Can I prevail upon you to join us at Grayle Old Place in Tottenham as soon as it is convenient for you to do so?"

"You may expect us in the morning, Mr. Grayle," said Pons.

Thereupon our client came at once to his feet, bowed with almost military precision, thanked Pons, and took formal leave of us.

Pons, his eyes twinkling, turned to me. "There is as engaging a fellow as I have laid eyes upon for some time."

"A man like that would be capable of anything," I said.

"Precisely. You have done me a good turn, Parker; I have been interested in the case ever since first I saw it in the papers. Indeed, I am carrying it with me."

So saying, he reached into his pocket and came forth with a neatly folded batch of cuttings, through which he searched without delay, selecting one finally, and drawing it forth.

"Ah, here we are. 'Murder of Prominent Landlord,' " he read. "'Alexander Grayle, sixty seven, of Tottenham, near North allerton, Yorkshire, was found dead in a country lane not far from his home. . . .' And so on. 'His death is the third in a series. Two previous victims were discovered in similar circumstances. . . .' A curious, if somewhat gruesome, business, this. And clearly, I should venture to guess, intended to point to Septimus Grayle."

"The torn throat, yes," I agreed. "It would suggest the werewolf concept. Doubtless all the villagers are fully aware of Grayle's aberration."

"Unquestionably. All the deaths have been nocturnal, all have taken place on moonlit nights, when Grayle is known to yield to his strange compulsion. I submit, Parker, that this is no mere coincidence, but rather evidence of a design, which, if the facts are as Octavius Grayle has presented them, has already had the desired effect upon the local police who have proceeded, however deferentially, against Septimus. I fear there is devil's work afoot.

Parker. Something dark and devious that troubles our client more than he has confided."

He looked up speculatively. "Can you come, Parker? Or is your practise too demanding?"

"I have a *locum tenens*," I answered. "You know I would be delighted."

"And your wife?"

"Constance is visiting her mother in Kent. She would urge me to go."

"Capital!" exclaimed Pons. "Wifely concurrence in these little adventures is always advisable. I have not looked up the railway timetable, but I believe we can entrain in the morning and arrive in good time. Let us have breakfast together and set out after."

Accordingly, early the following morning we met at 7B Praed Street in the familiar quarters which we had shared for so many years prior to my marriage, and partook of a hearty breakfast prepared by Mrs. Johnson, who served us with many assurances of her delight at seeing us together once again. Pons had already gone through the morning papers, and at the time of my arrival he sat in the midst of a host of newspapers scattered around his chair.

"There is nothing further on the Tottenham puzzle," he said when at last Mrs. Johnson had left us. "The local police have given out the customary statements fortunately in nothing like the volubility of their American counterparts. This time, however, I have no doubt that an arrest is imminent. There are delicate hints that the culprit is to be found in a high place, which presumably has reference to people of the Grayles' position in a village like Tottenham. Yet there has been no further outbreak."

"Do you expect one, then?"

"There will certainly be a fourth victim—possibly even a fifth," he said enigmatically.

"You sound very positive."

"Ah, Parker—how it used to annoy you! But it is not so. The speculation takes its rise in a logical deduction. Septimus Grayle either is guilty or he is not. Octavius does not believe him to be guilty. Supposing that he is correct, then I venture to guess that a fourth victim is inevitably meant to follow—obviously, that is Septimus himself. If he is not correct, there may well be another crime. And, remotely, yet one more beyond that. Contrary to the official position, there is very definitely a pattern in the crimes at Tottenham."

We set out directly after breakfast and were soon on the train en

route for Yorkshire. It was a fine summer morning, with an early mist lifting rapidly before the sun, and the landscape, green and rolling, beyond the carriage. But Pons was unaware of it: he sat throughout the journey with his hawk-like face turned away from the window, his chin sunk upon his chest, his eyes half-closed in an attitude of cogitation into which I did not break.

We changed at York for Thirsk and Northallerton, and on our arrival at Tottenham, we sought rooms at the Boar's Head, the only local inn of any size. There we paused only long enough to enable Pons to set down and dispatch to the local sergeant of police a note informing him that Pons would appreciate the opportunity to discuss the Tottenham murders with him. Then we ventured forth in search of Grayle Old Place. We found our objective within a short time and without difficulty, for it was one of the two most imposing houses in the village, the other being the abode, until recently, of the third victim of the Tottenham murderer, Alexander Grayle. It was a house set well back in its grounds, with a gate at the driveway, and a sweep of lawns reaching to the Victorian building in which our client lived. Beyond the house lay gently rolling fields and woods. Its setting at the edge of the village was so idyllic that the very thought of the crime which Pons had come to look into seemed alien.

The massive door was opened to us by a dignified butler, hard upon whose heels came our client himself. He walked down a wide hall, the walls of which bore portraits of Grayle ancestors, his hands extended in welcome.

"You are just in time for tea, gentlemen." To the butler he added, "Crandon, rooms for our guests."

"No," said Pons at once. "We have put up at the Boar's Head. It will give us greater freedom of movement."

An expression of disappointment crossed our client's face, but he said nothing. He turned on his heel and led the way into the drawing-room, where we were introduced to the other members of the family—Miss Regina Grayle, a woman whose dark, melancholy eyes belied her youth, a woman who clearly existed on a precarious line between youth and middle age, and whose austerity of dress, black with a high collar relieved only by a cameo, and coiffure, her hair drawn tightly about her head, accentuated rather middle age than youth; Randall Grayle, a brash young man, not long back from Canada, the son of yet another brother to our client's father; and Septimus Grayle, a tall, hawk-nosed man, lean almost to gauntness, who viewed us with frankly hostile eyes, in which

brooded an unconcealed torment. Septimus wore his hair long, it was greying now, but his face was still young, save for the scars of what appeared to be a fencing accident along his right cheek near his ear.

It was not readily evident whether our client had informed the household that he had retained Pons. Miss Regina made an inquiry as to whether Pons was assisting Sergeant Brinton to which Pons made an oblique reply; he was accustomed, he said, to lend the police all assistance within his modest power. This reply seemed to satisfy her. Not so Septimus, however; he continued to glower at Pons above the specious conversation which took place before the subject of the crimes in Tottenham was introduced.

"This terrible, terrible sequence of events," said Miss Regina passionately, clenching her hand about a handsome, old-fashioned back-scratcher she carried, "is all the more shocking when one considers that the police are actually concerned about our own Septimus, who would not harm a soul."

Septimus favoured his sister with a wan smile.

"Our dear uncle was an almost saintly man," continued the lady, "and I could not imagine who would have wished him harm. And little Miranda Choate, while she has been known for flightiness, could hardly have inspired so heinous a crime. And Mr. Gilton, a young man of estimable character—indeed, it is not so many years since I went about in his company quite often—who could have desired his death? Oh, it is madness, Mr. Pons, madness."

At the mention of madness, Septimus Grayle underwent a ghastly alteration. His face greyed, became chalk-like, his lantern-jaw fell, and he drew his breath with a rushing sound through his quivering lips. But this transformation was soon again masked, though the unpleasant impression it had given us could not be concealed so easily. I observed Pons watching him surreptitiously, and, beyond him, young Randall Grayle, whose singular brawniness found no complements even in his cousin Octavius's manifest strength. The expression on Randall Grayle's features was puzzling; I could not determine whether he hid disgust or triumph, cunning or naiveté.

"Forgive me, Septimus," said his sister quietly.

Our client looked over at Pons judiciously, as if to make certain that he had caught the interchange.

"Surely the police have not exhausted the avenues of inquiry," said Pons thoughtfully. "The press has set forth the lack of connection among the victims of the Tottenham murderer."

"There is none, Mr. Pons," said Octavius Grayle decisively.

"I submit that the choice of the victims may have a pattern."

"Homicidal mania reveals no pattern, Mr. Pons," said Miss Regina primly, reaching behind her to claw her back with the back-scratcher she was holding.

Pons inclined his head. Then he turned to Septimus Grayle. "Tell me, Mr. Grayle, did your late uncle leave a family?"

Septimus, who had hitherto not been directly addressed by Pons, was disagreeably startled. He gazed reproachfully at his brother, imploringly at his sister, and finally looked reluctantly at his inquisitor, who had not removed his eyes from him.

"No, no," he said hastily, with a marked uneasiness in his manner, "Uncle Alexander was not married. He was the one who wasn't, of the three brothers. Like us — none of us is married — except Randall; he's going to be, I think?" He looked to Randall for confirmation; the young man nodded and smiled. "We are all who are left. All the Grayles. We were never a large family. We have none of us married." A fine dew of perspiration made its appearance on his high forehead. Quite suddenly his voice changed. "And you know why, don't you, Mr. Pons? You know it. Everybody knows it!" he almost shouted. Then, biting his lip until it bled, he added almost in a whisper, "Madness! Madness! Madness!"

Abruptly he sprang to his feet and ran from the room.

Miss Regina rose, shot a punishing glance at her remaining brother, excused herself, and followed Septimus Grayle from the room.

"It was not what I would call a successful interview," said Randall Grayle dryly. "In Canada we do things differently — and perhaps more effectively."

Octavius looked angrily at his cousin. "May I remind you, Randall, that a gentleman always maintains the proper attitude toward guests?" He turned to Pons. "Pray excuse my impetuous cousin, Mr. Pons."

Pons lifted himself from the depths of his chair. "I fear we have exhausted our welcome, Mr. Grayle."

"Not at all, let me assure you," protested our client.

Randall Grayle said nothing at all. He had lit a cigarette and was watching curiously to see what Pons would do.

Pons began to walk from the room. "I am at your service at the Boar's Head, Mr. Grayle. Pray call on me there."

With this, we took our departure.

"What do you make of it, Pons?" I asked once we had got clear of the gate.

"A most interesting family, did you not think, Parker?"

"Oh, yes. But the murders?"

"Everything in good time, Parker. Do not be impatient. Let us just hurry along; unless I am greatly in error, Sergeant Brinton will be waiting for us."

Sergeant Brinton was indeed waiting for us at the Boar's Head. He was a young man, still, tall, big-boned, and sturdy in appearance. His manner was frank and co-operative, yet neither deferential nor condescending, though it was impossible for him to conceal entirely the impressiveness of this association with Solar Pons, whose reputation had long since spread the length and breadth of the British Isles.

"I was happy to have your note, Mr. Pons," he said without preamble. "I had learned from Mr. Octavius Grayle that he contemplated asking you to step into the case, rather than intercede with Scotland Yard. I am afraid, though, that there is little to be discovered."

"You are convinced it is Septimus Grayle?"

"I can conceive of no other solution. The crimes are very obviously the work of a homicidal maniac. All have taken place on moonlight nights, just such nights as those on which Septimus has his seizures. He imagines himself a dog, he bays at the moon. . . ."

"Pray enlighten me," interrupted Pons. "For how long a time has Septimus Grayle been the victim of this strange compulsion?"

"For most of his life, I believe."

"It does not occur to you that this additional, shall we say, pastime, of his nocturnal repertoire—the tearing out of throats—is comparatively recent?"

"Obviously."

"You do not think it strange that this proclivity did not manifest itself before this?"

"Insanity, Mr. Pons, is unpredictable."

"Is it not, indeed? I should not have thought so, would you, Parker?"

"Certain forms, of course," I agreed. "But the majority of cases follow a fairly well defined pattern. It is perfectly possible to predict a course of action."

The sergeant gazed at me thoughtfully and, I thought a trifle

impatiently, as if he thought I did not know what I was talking about. He forebore to say so, however.

"I submit that it is suggestive that this series of crimes took place within a relatively short time after the return of two of the Grayles from foreign parts," continued Pons.

Brinton gazed at him in candid astonishment. "You refer to Mr. Octavius and Mr. Randall." He did not wait for Pons's confirming nod. "But, of course, you do not mean to be serious. The suggestion is patently absurd—neither of them is a homicidal maniac."

"Ah, it is one of the characteristics of homicidal mania that it reveals no distinctive traits, such as those clearly associated with Septimus," said Pons. "But let us put aside this question for the moment. I would like to know something of the victims."

"I brought along photographs, Mr. Pons. If there is anything you would like to know, you have only to ask."

"Thank you, Sergeant. Let us just look at the photographs."

The sergeant opened a large manila envelope and offered Pons a sheaf of pictures, the majority of which had been taken of the bodies at the scene of the crime. I bent over Pons's shoulder and looked, too, as he went rapidly through the prints, which had an unpleasantly harsh reality afforded by the glaring light which had been thrown upon the brutally slaughtered victims.

They were not inspiring to look upon. The unhappy victims of this fiendish attack were sprawled out beside rustic paths. Pictures taken at close range indicated that each had had his throat torn out, plainly, as the amount of blood revealed, while he still lived. The little girl was most pathetic, and I could hardly bear to look upon the horrible scene so mercilessly revealed by the photographer.

Pons, however, appeared to have no such qualms. "Ah," he murmured. "Stunned, then killed."

"Exactly, Mr. Pons. The marks on the neck emphatically suggest some animal. May I point out that Mr. Septimus Grayle wears his nails unusually long?"

"I observed it," replied Pons grimly.

"The tears are deep, severing the jugular in each case. Death took place in a matter of minutes; the loss of blood was very great. In no case was any sound heard, though the victims were found on bypaths away from the better-illuminated thoroughfares. Only mania could explain such insensate and brutal murders, Mr. Pons."

Pons had not lifted his eyes from the photographs. "Repeated attempts to sever the jugular, not just one gash," he said. He looked up at last. "Was this man Gilton married?"

"No, Mr. Pons. He was engaged."

"His age?"

"Thirty-seven."

"He was financially comfortable?"

"Quite. He leaves only a sister, who inherits." Brinton paused and added, "I believe she is to be married to young Mr. Randall Grayle."

Pons closed his eyes and sat for a moment in silence. "And Mr. Alexander Grayle?" he asked presently.

"He was single, and wealthy. The four Grayles are his only heirs; they will divide his estate. But I must in duty point out to you that each of the Grayles is independently wealthy."

Pons turned this over in his mind. He did not comment on the wealth of the Grayles. "Let us return for a moment to Mr. Gilton," he said. "Is he not approximately of the same age as the youngest of the three Grayles?"

"I believe so, yes. He kept company with Miss Regina for some time. He was at that time rather indigent, but soon came into money through a series of fortunate investments."

"He was not favoured by Miss Regina Grayle?"

The sergeant shrugged. "I would not say precisely that, Mr. Pons. It was only that they simply drifted apart; perhaps they had been keeping company too long. They remained close friends, though I believe the brothers did not particularly fancy him." He cleared his throat uncertainly. "But I assure you, Mr. Pons, it is Septimus Grayle who holds the key to the riddle."

"And the child," continued Pons imperturbably.

"Poor Miranda Choate! She had been at a children's party and was returning home. She had been escorted for most of the way to her door by a party of young people together with an older person who was their chaperone. There was a short distance just before her gate—by a coincidence, in the vicinity of the lane in which Gilton's body had been found; they had not walked that far, but stood at the other end until she had time to reach the gate. She was heard to call out a last good night. Evidence shows that she was struck down then, though her body was not found there, but down on a bridle-path which led away to one side of her home."

"An only child?"

"No, sir. One of a large family. She was a pert little thing."

The sergeant stood patiently waiting on Pons's next question. He seemed somewhat puzzled by the tenor and direction of Pons's inquiry, and quite clearly could not conceive what end Pons pursued. He was no more mystified than I.

But Pons had no further inquiries. He gathered the photographs together and handed them to Brinton. "I am indebted to you, Sergeant. If I should need to send for you in some haste, I daresay you could be reached at the station?"

"Certainly, Mr. Pons, at any time. My home is in the same building."

"Capital, capital!"

After Sergeant Brinton had gone, Pons sat musing for some little time. I waited patiently on his cogitation, and presently found his eyes dwelling on me in sardonic amusement.

"Is it not remarkable, Parker, how readily the human mind is blinded by the obvious?" he asked.

"I suppose it is the obverse of being too eager to shunt aside the obvious for the obscure."

"Well spoken, Parker," rejoined Pons, smiling. "But is there not something about this curious sequence of events which gives you pause?"

"Nothing but the obvious," I replied firmly. "Here is the work of someone who is definitely unstable."

"Indeed," said Pons with heavy irony. "I submit that there is far more here than meets the eye. It does not seem to you that there is a pattern in these events?"

"None."

"Mr. Gilton was indigent; he became wealthy. His sister, who is to inherit his wealth, is engaged to marry Mr. Randall Grayle. The little Choate girl lived in the vicinity of the scene of Gilton's death. Alexander Grayle left no other heirs but the Grayles, who are wealthy and are now destined to become more so. Either these events are totally without connection, or they are the setting of a stage, and the return of Mr. Randall Grayle or our client served as the catalytic agent to precipitate them."

I could not help smiling. "I am afraid there is such a thing as looking too far afield for the solution of any puzzle," I said.

"I am delighted to hear you say so, Parker," said Pons, his eyes twinkling mischievously. "I am habitually distrustful of the obvious."

"But one need not be insistent on ignoring it. It is not beyond Septimus Grayle's malady to have led him to murder. There is an old adage that where there is smoke, there must be some fire."

"Ah, yes, but the fire may be of incendiary origin," retorted Pons. He looked at his watch and added, "I fancy we had better have a little supper, for, unless I am greatly mistaken, we shall need to return to Grayle Old Place before the night is far along."

"Why do you say so?"

"Is there not a moon tonight? I believe it is near the full. With both the moon and ourselves in Tottenham, the werewolf could scarcely resist the challenge. Moreover, it is past time for the final act of this gruesome little drama."

With this enigmatic statement, Pons led the way to the dining-room and we partook of a spare meal of beef and cabbage, Pons discoursing meanwhile on the lore of lycanthropy, with its roots in ancient beliefs of mankind, recalling many of the highly successful fictions in the genre as a parallel to references involving obscure and authenticated cases of diabolic cannibalistic acts associated with certain obscure crimes which bore at least a superficial resemblance to lycanthropic practises.

Our supper hour over, we retired to our quarters, where for some time Pons sat deep in thought, occasionally turning to the newspaper accounts of the Tottenham murders, which he had brought along from London. From time to time he glanced at the clock, always with increasing restlessness.

"You are expecting someone?" I ventured at last.

"Now that darkness has fallen and the moon has risen, yes. I hope he will not disappoint me, or we may be too late to prevent another crime."

"Surely not!" I cried. "Who is it, then?"

"Our client. Who else? I submit that his next move must be to introduce us to Septimus by night."

He had no sooner spoken than there was a discreet, yet urgent tap on the door. Pons sprang at once to open it, disclosing Octavius Grayle.

"Mr. Pons, can you come?" he asked in a hushed voice.

"We are at your service, Mr. Grayle. I take it your brother has had a seizure?"

Our client nodded. "He has just left the house. I know the paths he will take. For the time being he will confine himself to the

grounds and to the woods and byways outside the village; he seldom ventures near the village itself until past midnight — and he does not always remain away from the house for more than an hour, so that he seldom invades Tottenham."

Octavius Grayle led the way rapidly to Grayle Old Place, where he entered the grounds not by the central gate, but by means of a small garden gate which opened through a hedge out of sight of the principal entrance. At once the perfumes of flowers and herbs invaded our nostrils, rising with cloying insistence in the humid evening. The moon shone high overhead, now near the full, a great luminous satellite laving all the earth in its unterrestrial radiance. Beyond the garden, the house loomed spectrally, with but little light showing in its windows, save where the moon reflected from the panes.

Our client made his way by a devious route around the house and plunged into the shadowed paths on the far side. It was patent presently that his goal was a small eminence not far ahead and yet a considerable distance from the house. Octavius Grayle moved with an agility which was remarkable in one of his years, for soon we were mounting the slope through a glade toward an open place beyond.

At that instant there burst upon our ears a weird and horrible sound — the simulated howling of a wolf or baying of a dog by human voice. Before me, our client, who had reached the top of the knoll, turned and caught hold of Pons's arm as my companion came up.

"You hear?" he whispered harshly. "Now watch — over there."

Below, the moonlit landscape rolled gently away in grassy valleys and dark woods. Our client pointed to a valley not far distant, plainly part of the Grayle estate. Even as he spoke, a shadowy figure loped on all fours across the moonlit glade, out of one dark wood into another, and through it to emerge on the far side, once again in the moonlight, where it rose halfway and once again gave voice to that horribly suggestive ululation which so closely resembled the howling of some wild beast.

"He began it as a child," whispered Octavius Grayle. "Will he ever cease, I wonder?"

"That is in Parker's department," murmured Pons.

"If one finds the cause," I said. "There is a reason hidden deep in his subconscious for compulsions such as this."

"I hope you are right, Doctor," said our client fervently. "I do not relish living out my life with this, every moonlit night. Now mark him; he has begun to move again; he will follow the line of that valley, plunge into the wood over there, and when he emerges from it he will begin an arc which will bring him either through the copse at the foot of this knoll, or on this other slope and across part of the knoll itself. We shall watch both courses; if you, Mr. Pons, will watch the slope itself, with Dr. Parker, I will descend to the copse."

"And by what signal shall we communicate?" asked Pons.

"If his baying does not suffice, let us say the crying of a screech owl to signify that he has passed."

"Agreed," murmured Pons.

Thereupon Octavius Grayle vanished into the shadows on the far side of the slope, leaving Pons and myself in possession of the knoll. But Pons had no intention of remaining; he paused only long enough to instruct me.

"Pray hold the fort, Parker," he whispered. "I am not interested in that afflicted man. Guard yourself; we have been followed."

Then he was gone on the path taken by our client.

I looked uneasily around, but was reassured by the expanse of unbroken moonlight holding to the top of the knoll. No one could creep upon me unseen without the protection of shadows, which did not begin for some distance down the slope on all sides. I gazed once more along the route defined by our client as that customarily taken by his unfortunate brother; but Septimus Grayle was nowhere to be seen. Perhaps he had varied his route; perhaps he lingered on the edge of a wood out of range of my vision.

Suddenly his voice sounded once more, raised in that eerie crying. Small wonder that Tottenham looked upon him with fear and suspicion! Even as I thought so, even while the echoes of that fearful cry still resounded in the valleys, I heard and recognized another voice.

"Parker! Parker! Here—at once."

It was Pons. Casting discretion to the winds, I sped down the slope in the direction of his voice as fast as I could run through that unfamiliar country. Down out of the moonlight into the dense trees of the slope; through one grove and past another patch of moonlight, finding a dim, winding path; and, at the foot of the slope, into another, even denser, copse. In my headlong rush, I almost fell over Pons.

He was crouched on the ground in deep shadow. In a moment I saw that he held our client in his arms. Octavius Grayle lay ominously still.

"For God's sake!" I cried. "What has happened?"

"My torch is in the grass beside me, just out of my reach," said Pons. "It fell from my hand. His throat has been cut; I cannot determine how badly, but his pulse is still strong."

It was the work of but a few moments to recover Pons's lamp, to turn it upon our client, and to ascertain that, though he was unconscious from the blow which had struck him down and bleeding profusely from his throat, his jugular vein had not been severed, no important artery had sustained any injury, and, unless the blow were more serious than it appeared, he would recover.

"What happened?" I asked again.

An exclamation of disgust escaped Pons. "I was only just too late," he said bitterly.

"I should have said you were just in time," I answered. "Was it an animal?"

"The Tottenham werewolf," murmured Pons. "It is unforgivable; I anticipated this and was not fast enough to prevent it. Our pursuer was closer than I thought."

"The attack perhaps you did not prevent; his death you certainly did prevent. Come, let us get him to the house. I can stanch this wound here."

"We shall want Sergeant Brinton," said Pons. "There is still time for us to catch a late train back to London."

"Poor Septimus," I murmured.

"Oh, it was not Septimus," said Pons lightly. "But no less obvious, for all that."

He did not explain this cryptic announcement.

The Grayle family, with Pons and myself, were gathered about our client's bedside, when Detective-Sergeant Brinton came into the room from an examination of the house and grounds. He carried the bloodstained back-scratcher which had belonged to Miss Regina Grayle.

"Just as you thought, Mr. Pons—it was in Septimus's quarters," he said.

"Oh, no, not Septimus!" cried Miss Regina in anguish.

Randall Grayle looked at Pons with distrust plain on his handsome features.

Octavius Grayle opened his eyes and regarded the tableau before him. He met Pons's steady gaze.

"You know now, Mr. Pons?" he whispered.

"Indeed, sir. I knew from the time of our initial visit here."

The sergeant stepped reluctantly toward Septimus.

"But, no, Sergeant," interposed Pons. "Miss Regina is right. It is not Septimus. The charge must be placed against Miss Regina herself."

For a moment there was an arresting silence.

Then Miss Regina Grayle's placidity dropped from her; her prim face underwent an awesome transformation, glowing with a maniacal rage; with the agility and speed of a cat, she leaped forward, snatched the back-scratcher from the sergeant's hands, and struck at Pons, who caught her arm and twisted it unceremoniously behind her back. In this manner he held her.

"Your prisoner, Sergeant."

"Mr. Pons, I am afraid . . .," began the sergeant uncertainly, looking on with dismay.

"I think, if you will examine into the status of the family fortunes, you will find ample evidence, Sergeant," said Pons crisply. "Mr. Gilton should have repaid the money she lent him, unsecured though it was; it would have saved his life; it would have saved the life of the little girl who witnessed something which might have trapped Miss Regina; it would have saved the life of Alexander Grayle, whose bequest was necessary to conceal the loss of the money in her care she took from Septimus. Except for the bequest from Alexander, Miss Regina and Septimus are both without more than the most vitally necessary funds. If Octavius had not begun to suspect something amiss, her diabolic plan might well have carried through—he would have been the fourth victim, and Septimus, as the planned and perfect suspect, the fifth."

"The problem turned on an elementary factor," said Pons out of the darkness of our compartment, as the late train sped toward London and the welcome security of our respective quarters. "There was no obvious motive, as the puzzle was presented to us, and there were too many suggestions of homicidal mania, which would rule out motive. However, of the three victims, two were possessed of means, the younger man having come by wealth somewhat recently, the older wealthy by long standing. Now, Parker, I submit that when a man of wealth is murdered, the

motive which at once presents itself is gain. The primary consideration at Tottenham which obscured every other was the curious behaviour of Septimus Grayle; yet to the observer untroubled by the affliction of the so-called Tottenham werewolf, the motive for gain immediately appeared."

"Ah, but it was generally believed that the Grayles were themselves wealthy," I put in.

"It is elementary that a premise is either true or not true. No one had any question but that Miss Regina Grayle was independently wealthy, and that she had therefore no need of a bequest such as her uncle left. You know my methods, Parker; I could not accept the assumption, and proceeded on the precise opposite. Though everyone stated without equivocation that the Grayles were wealthy, there was no evidence to support the premise, apart from the specious fact of their ownership of Grayle Old Place. On the hypothetical assumption that the generally accepted belief was unfounded, I could conceive of the reasonable motive and its instant application to one of the four who stood to gain by Alexander Grayle's death.

"Proceeding in this fashion, then, it followed that there was a reason for each crime. If the motive for Alexander Grayle's death were gain, then the young man and the girl might have been killed solely to confuse any investigation with the suggestion of homicidal mania. Yet a secondary motive was not inadmissible, and I had to look for it. It was perfectly plain at our meeting in the Diogenes Club that Octavius Grayle had certain apprehensions he did not reveal. Clearly, too, he was both observant and intelligent, and it was patent from the beginning even as he had hinted that the murderer was deliberately planning for the arrest and imprisonment of Septimus Grayle as the climax to the events which had taken place at Tottenham. This implied a secondary motive.

"I had to ask myself who but some member of his own family could possibly have motive for desiring Septimus to be found guilty. I confess that for a short time I was thrown off the track by the fact that both Octavius and Randall had but recently returned to England; there was thus presumptive evidence that their return was connected with the events at Tottenham, and the primary assumption, of course, was that one or the other of them was guilty. And yet I could not deny that anyone encountering the problem could be expected to reason in this manner. If neither were guilty, only Miss Regina remained. Therefore, either one of the prodigals

was guilty, or the return of one or both set in motion a chain of events which culminated in the wanton crimes at Tottenham.

"Our brief visit to Grayle Old Place this afternoon confirmed my suspicion of Miss Regina. She spoke of the first victim, you will remember, with passing regret and carefully concealed animosity, which was surely nothing more than the hatred of a woman scorned she had kept company with him, but he was now betrothed to someone else. She spoke of Miranda Choate as naughty and saucy, as if to salve her conscience. She spoke of her murdered uncle with something akin to remorse, which was as genuine as her conviction of the necessity of his death. Finally, she herself leveled at her brother Septimus by suggestion as the only possible explanation for the crimes the charge of homicidal mania.

"I had my murderer; I had then to find the motive. Sergeant Brinton supplied it. He said of Gilton, if you recall, that at the time he was keeping company with Miss Regina, he was 'rather indigent, but soon came into money with a series of fortunate investments.' Now, I submit, Parker, that in order for young Gilton to have made investments he must have received money from some source. What source more obvious than Miss Regina, who in her infatuation showered him with all the money he demanded, using not only her own funds but also those of her brother, Septimus, which were in her care? Indeed, one feels bound to ask whether Gilton's 'fortunate investments' were an actuality or whether they were simply his canny accumulation of the money he had obtained from that infatuated woman.

"Surely, then, the obvious first victim of her counterfeiting homicidal mania might as well be the young man who had spurned as well as robbed her. The selection of the child was purely coincidental; a little girl had seen her in the vicinity at the time Gilton had been killed. Miss Regina accordingly feared her, and she became the second victim. The stage was then set for Alexander Grayle's death, and he, too, died as the others—stunned by a blow from the leaded handle of her back scratcher, and calmly dispatched while unconscious by what must certainly be regarded as one of the most unusual lethal weapons in a long roster of adventures.

"Having proceeded thus far, it was only logical to assume that if Octavius had not already arrived at the same conclusion, he must soon do so. It followed, therefore, that his death must occur with as little delay as possible, in order that Miss Regina's purpose might be

accomplished. I had only to wait upon events. Our entrance on the scene would surely precipitate her violence, even as Octavius's arrival in England and his subsequent inquiry into the state of Septimus's finances set in motion the events which were the final acts in the concealed tragedy which was Miss Regina's life.

"All in all, an interesting if gruesome diversion. I am indebted to you, Parker."

The Adventure of the Troubled Magistrate

"JUSTICE," SAID SOLAR PONS, as we sat on either side of the fire in our old lodgings one misty November evening, "is a comparatively rare commodity, perhaps because it is so difficult of definition. I daresay, therefore, it is altogether fitting that a certain Hereford magistrate should be uneasy in mind. Tell me, Parker, does the name Fielding Anstruther mean anything to you?"

"I can't say that it does," I answered after reflection.

"It was but one chance in a thousand that you might have seen the name in the lists appended to some of those ridiculous petitions for the abolition of capital punishment which come up from time to time. He is a magistrate in the West Country, and it would appear, unless his daughter is in error, that he is very much disturbed. This came for me half an hour before your arrival."

So saying, he reached into the pocket of his dressing-gown and tossed an envelope to me.

I opened the letter inside and read it.

"DEAR MR. PONS,

"As I am visiting London for a few days I am taking the liberty of addressing you to learn whether I may call to discuss my father's trouble. He is Mr. Fielding Anstruther, magistrate at Ross, and I fear the curious events following the Assizes have upset him most grievously. If the messenger fails to bring me an adverse response, I will expect to call at No. 7B at eight o'clock this evening.

"I am, sir, yours respectfully,

"VIOLET ANSTRUTHER."

I looked up. "This is surely an intriguing little note."

"Is it not?" agreed Pons, his eyes dancing. "And one would have expected that the curious events to which Miss Anstruther refers might have achieved some public notice. But search as I may, I find little in the columns of the newspapers to suggest what it is that troubles the worthy magistrate. Save, perhaps, this little item from the *Daily Mail* a week ago."

He picked up the newspaper from beside his chair and read,

" 'Death of Percy Dixon. Percy Dixon was found dead this morning at Ross, Hereford. Mr. Dixon had recently been charged in the matter of Henry Archer, who was the victim of foul play six months ago at his place of business in Ross. Dixon was discharged because of insufficient evidence. He appeared at the Assizes, having been remanded by local magistrates with Mr. Fielding Anstruther as Chairman of the bench.' "

"There is surely nothing curious about that," I said.

"No, since coincidence is far more usual than people like to believe," observed Pons. "Nevertheless, I find it interesting in the circumstances."

"Our client's letter mentions 'events'—so these must have been plural."

Pons glanced at the clock on the mantel. "It lacks but a few minutes to eight, and I fancy we shall have to abate our curiosity until that hour."

He filled his clay pipe with the abominable shag he smoked and settled back to wait. But he had hardly done so, when there was a ring at the outer bell, and within a few moments Mrs. Johnson showed in a young lady in her late twenties, a fine figure of a woman, with challenging black eyes and a provocative mouth, who, with the unerring intuition of her sex, instantly addressed herself to Pons.

"Mr. Pons, I am Violet Anstruther."

"Come in, Miss Anstruther. Dr. Parker and I have been awaiting you."

I had got up to draw forward a chair for our client, who thanked me and sat down as she loosened the fur piece about her neck. She betrayed a certain agitation only in the nervous way in which she clenched and unclenched her hands.

"I'm at my wits' end, Mr. Pons," she began, 'or I would never have come to you."

I flashed a glance at Pons, but this little "compliment" appeared to have escaped him.

"And I'm sure that if my father knew I had come, he would be furious. He is a very reserved and proud man—very sure of himself within his world, which is that of law and justice—and certain matters would seem to have conspired to unsettle him."

"You mentioned 'certain events' in your note, Miss Anstruther, and now speak of them again. Do you do so with direct knowledge from your father?"

"No, Mr. Pons. That is the problem. For some months now father has paced the floor long hours in the night. His appetite has fallen off. He cannot seem to sleep, yet he looks dreadfully tired. He is often so preoccupied that he is sometimes not aware that we've spoken to him."

" 'We'?"

"My Aunt Susan, father's younger sister, lives with us." She went on. "He has lost weight, and makes some little joke or other when I call his preoccupation to his attention. Of what is on his mind, he has not said a word, I've not asked him directly, but I know if he had any intention of speaking, he would do so."

"Mr. Pons, I thought at first that perhaps money matters were at the root of his trouble. But this is not so. I have assured myself of that. His investments are sound, and our income hasn't fallen off in the least. We're comfortably situated; at mother's death she left a considerable sum, which was an adequate amount even after death-duties. Nor could I find any variation in his daily habits, other than those I've just mentioned, that would suggest some important alteration in his personal life. He has received no unusual letters; no one, other than the customary companions of his lifetime, has called upon him; indeed, Mr. Pons, I can think of nothing but that he is concerned over the way in which some of his cases have been disposed of, post-trial, so to speak."

"Ah, then Mr. Dixon is not the only gentleman who has appeared before your father to have subsequently died?" put in Pons.

"No, sir. He is only the most recent. This day week, in fact. He is the third, altogether. The first was Hester Spring. It seems probable that she smothered her baby. My father is a very just, upright man, and he felt there was a possibility of accident. She died about a month after her discharge. The coroner's jury decided that her death was an accident; she had been drinking and suffocated in her bed."

"And the next?"

"The second was Algy Burke. He ran down old Mr. Carter one night months ago. He served four months for manslaughter. He died in an accident—run over one night when he stepped out of his yard to walk up the street toward the pub. The driver of the car was never found."

"And Mr. Dixon?"

"That was apparently something to do with his heart, Mr. Pons."

"What of the matter in which he was charged?"

"Mr. Archer was held up and robbed in his shop. He seems to have put up some resistance and was brutally struck on the head. He died in the hospital a day later, as a result of this blow. The general feeling in Ross is that Dixon did it, but my father, who was Chairman of the bench, felt that the case was not proven. The case went to Assizes, of course, and the Judge and Jury evidently agreed with him. I know it sounds typically like a woman's reasoning, Mr. Pons, but I've looked everywhere else for something to fix upon, and I can come up with nothing other than these—well, they are simply coincidences."

"Are they?" asked Pons thoughtfully. "I wonder. I am always suspicious of coincidences, no matter how frequently they take place. They may not be the work of the Prime Mover." He cogitated for a moment, then asked, "These events were consecutive as you narrated them."

Our client hesitated briefly. "Yes, Mr. Pons."

"I detect some hesitation in your voice, Miss Anstruther."

"That is to say, Hester Spring, Algy Burke, and Percy Dixon died in that order. Actually, though, Dixon's case was first in order before my father's bench—then Burke, then Spring."

Pons sat for a moment in deep thought, while our client preserved a respectful silence, intently watching Pons's lean face as he sat with eyes closed, contemplating what she had told him. Presently he opened his eyes and gazed soberly at Miss Anstruther.

"These little coincidences have all taken place in Ross?" he asked.

"Yes, Mr. Pons."

"Yet your father, as a magistrate, occasionally sits on other benches in the area?"

"Yes, of course, Mr. Pons."

"And have these coincidences dogged his deliberations elsewhere?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"Curious," murmured Pons. "Most curious."

"Mr. Pons, will you look into the matter for me?"

"I confess my interest in what you have told me, Miss Anstruther," said Pons, "but if your father is determined to lock his trouble inside him, it may be difficult to approach him."

"Father sits tomorrow at Ross. It is the case of a wife-beater, and father will have little sympathy for him. I propose to invite you and Dr. Parker—if he will come—"(here she smiled very prettily in my direction) "to be my guests at dinner in our home so that you may

see father for yourself. If you have no objection, since father may know your name, I propose to introduce you as — let us say Professor Moriarty of Kings' College."

Pons smiled. He got to his feet and said, "Done "

"Paddington in the morning, Mr. Pons. The train will bring you to Ross by late afternoon. I myself leave by the last train tonight."

After she had taken her leave, Pons returned to the fireside and sat for a long time in thoughtful silence, his eyes closed, his fine, lean fingers tented before him. Presently he glanced over at me and spoke.

"What do you make of it, Parker?"

"I'm afraid I can say only it is all an emotional woman's imagination," I replied.

"What!" cried Pons. "Three people have died I should hardly call that imagination."

"God disposes in His mysterious way," I retorted. "It may sound trite, Pons, but that seems to be the long and short of it."

"Ah, but even He may have a little help now and then," said Pons, smiling enigmatically.

"Pons, you aren't serious!" I protested. "This is surely nothing more than a series of coincidences."

"I have not said it is other than that," said Pons amiably. "I fancy that far more than three people escaped justice at Mr. Anstruther's court, in deference to his horror of wrongly punishing anyone, and that they are all in good health."

"Well, that is a very sensible conclusion."

"I hope I may always be, as you put it, 'sensible,' " responded Pons, with a wry smile and a twinkle in his keen eyes. "But perhaps Mr. Anstruther does not think the author of these events Providence."

"I have often found that justices tend, after a long term, to equate themselves with Providence."

Pons smiled. "I daresay it is idle to speculate in this matter. We have too few facts to assimilate. If your wife can spare you, pray give me the pleasure of your company tomorrow."

Late the following afternoon we crossed the lovely Severn and were soon entering Ross, a country town above the left bank of the Wye, and one little spoiled by industrialization. Our client herself waited at the station in a pony-cart.

She seemed completely recovered from her agitation of the previous evening, as she announced that she had taken rooms for us at the Swan and added, "Nothing has changed at home, Mr. Pons. But you'll see for yourself when you meet father at dinner tonight."

"I look forward to it, Miss Anstruther."

Our client drove us to the Swan, where we left our valises. Then we went around to her home on the far edge of the town. It was a gracious Victorian house, surrounded by a hedge. A garage and stable-block was attached, which doubtless housed our conveyance when it was not in use.

"For the time being," explained Miss Anstruther as she led us into the house, "we are quite alone except for the cook, who is preparing dinner. Aunt Susan spends a few hours every afternoon assisting at the local hospital - she has had some nurse's training and the two of us take turns at the typing of my father's notes and papers."

"These no doubt include the records of his cases," said Pons.

"Yes - and of course, talks he often gives, and letters to the press - he feels very strongly opposed to capital punishment, Mr. Pons."

"I was aware that he is," said Pons. "I hope you will not take it amiss if I seek to draw him out on the subject at dinner."

"By no means. It is perhaps the only subject that will stir him from his preoccupation."

Pons's glance now lingered on what was obviously a man's easy-chair, with a little rack of books beside it and one open on its arm, turned face down. I looked at its title *Somnambulism and Its Causes* and observed three other books on similar subjects mingled with obviously legal tomes on the rack.

Noticing our interest, our client said, "That is where father spends much of the night, when he is not pacing the floor. Oh, Mr. Pons, do you think you can help him?"

"We shall see."

We had not long to wait for the arrival of the other members of the household. As it happened, they came together in the car driven by our client's aunt, who had called at the court to give her brother a lift. He appeared to be a man not much over fifty, and she perhaps not quite ten years younger. They were rather dour-faced people, clearly brother and sister, and their features had a curiously equine appearance, being long and rather more broad

than the average, with firm, almost prognathous jaws, wide mouths, and clear, direct eyes.

They did not seem very much surprised to meet guests at their table, which suggested that our client was left perfectly free to lead her own life—as, plainly, each of them led his.

"Professor Moriarty?" repeated the magistrate. "Sir, that is a familiar name. What is your field?"

"Sociology," replied Pons without a trace of guile. "I am in a very real sense a student of my fellowmen."

"The proper study of man," agreed Anstruther.

Our client called us to the table for dinner as Pons and Anstruther were talking. As we sat down, Pons continued.

"And you, sir, have you not made a name for yourself in your efforts to make capital punishment obsolete?"

The magistrate seemed mildly pleased. "If I may say so," he said.

"It does not occur to you that the entire direction of the movement for abolition and all the concurrent goals may be a trifle unnatural?"

Anstruther frowned. His eyes fired. "In what way, Professor?"

"Why, sir," said Pons, waxing to his little game, "surely it must have struck you that the whole matter is against nature. Here we are engaged in preserving the unfit at the expense of the fit, some seventy years after Mr. Darwin pointed out that in nature only the fit survive to best perpetuate the species."

"That is certainly a novel idea," said Miss Susan Anstruther, not without lively interest. "I had never thought of it that way."

"Hardly novel, dear lady," said Pons. "It's only the broad view. I've always found that opponents of capital punishment, devotees of correctional treatment over punitive action, and the like, are incapable of seeing the forest for the tree—for the sake of one human being, they are quite willing to ruin society." He turned again toward our host. "Does this strike you as heresy, Mr. Anstruther?"

"I suppose," said the magistrate with a fine edge of sarcasm, "it is what you might call evolutionary."

"*Touché*!" cried Pons, smiling. "And what do you call your view?"

"I am a simple humanitarian, Professor."

"Ah, yes," said Pons, resuming the attack with spirit, "I have never known it to fail but that every one of these theorists—call them welfare workers or psychoanalysts or even sociologists—would

have us believe theirs is the humanitarian view and any other is brutalization of the finer instincts of mankind. They are all perfectly willing to consign half a dozen worthy human beings to the grave, if they can 'rehabilitate' - I believe they call it - one lost sheep who would have left society somewhat richer if he had been quietly executed without delay in the first place."

Our host was plainly astounded, if not outraged. "Sir, that is a medieval view!"

"Another catchword. Another label," said Pons. "Mr. Anstruther, I put it to you that the essential fabric of society would be vastly improved if we could liquidate a basic ten per cent of mankind without quibbling about these purely false moral issues."

"Professor, that is monstrous," cried the magistrate in tones of horror. "I cannot believe you are serious."

"I was never more so," said Pons.

"There's something in what Professor Moriarty says," said Miss Susan Anstruther, her eyes glinting with excited interest.

"It is *all* there," said Pons.

Our host was by now almost speechless. "You hardly talk like a sociologist," he said with a touch of asperity in his voice. "Unless you've taken your training in one of the Continental countries where they hold that certain types of humans are superior to others - or in the Orient, where they consider human life of no consequence whatever."

"My education, sir, is much humbler. Public school and Oxford. *Summa cum laude*, I should add."

If Pons had set out to outrage our host, he could have taken no other course with equal success. Anstruther was by now almost purple with suppressed anger; he had not lifted a morsel of food to his lips since Pons's position had become clear to him, but he was too much the gentleman to forget his place as our host and could not give himself to venting the anger he manifestly felt. Pons, however, had achieved his goal, and he now spoke in more mollifying tones.

"But at least you, sir, practise what you believe. Your court has a reputation for leniency."

Mr. Anstruther swallowed. "I try to be fair, sir."

"My brother bends over backwards," put in Miss Susan Anstruther, not without indignation. "He gives every consideration to the criminal."

"And none to the victim," said Pons, chuckling. "An all-too-human trait. One does not see before one what is safely in the grave."

I thought our host would burst with fury. I put in quickly, "In my profession, too, we prefer to save lives—not destroy them."

Our client was beginning to show signs of puzzled distress. She looked from Pons to me, from me to her father and back to Pons. She no more than I knew what Pons was about, but she shared my hope that Pons would soon drop the subject. Quite as if he read our minds, Pons abruptly did so.

"But our positions are patently not reconcilable, sir," he said quietly, "and perhaps I have not given this matter as much thought as it needs. Of late, too, I have been much engaged in the study of somnambulism. Tell me, sir, do you ever walk in your sleep?"

The effect of this simple question upon our host was positively astounding. The angry red and purple washed out of his face as if a drain had been opened to draw these mottled colours away. Mr. Anstruther went deadly pale; his fork clattered to the table, though he had been holding it in his clenched fist like a weapon during Pons's outrageous discourse; his fingers fell to the table's edge and gripped there; and his eyes fixed on Pons as if he looked upon a ghost.

I leaped up. "Sir, you are unwell!"

He shook his head, not trusting himself to speak. Slowly he pushed his chair back from the table. Our client flashed Pons a glance of mingled dismay and perplexity as she went around to her father's elbow.

Mr. Anstruther came slowly to his feet, regaining his dignity. He bowed formally. "Pray excuse me, gentlemen."

Then he walked steadily from the room, our client at his heels.

Miss Susan Anstruther got to her feet, too, somewhat agitated and reproachful in her manner. She meant to escape the scene, but Pons was not yet ready to let her go.

"I could not help observing that your views are directly opposed to your brother's, Miss Anstruther," said Pons.

"Oh, yes," she said, her expression altering at once, and the same kind of fire coming into her eyes as had burned in her brother's during his anger at Pons. "There are so many who get away. Week after week on a national scale. Rapists, wife-killers, drunken drivers—all kinds of murderers—turned loose on technicalities

which are a mockery of justice. To rape and stab and butcher again and again!" She bit her lip suddenly. "I try to tell my brother."

"You feel strongly about this, Miss Anstruther."

"I do, I do indeed. But it is Fielding who is the magistrate – not I. Besides, Henry was my friend – a very dear friend." Here her eyes grew misty with tears and her agitation increased. "*He . . .* just lets them go!" She seemed to shudder, controlled herself, and said quietly, "If you will excuse me – it's time for me to go to church."

Pons and I both rose and bowed as she went out.

Now that we were alone, I could no longer hold back my sentiments. "In all the years I've known you, Pons," I cried, "I have seldom witnessed anything more disgraceful than your conduct this evening."

"Was it not!" he agreed enthusiastically.

"How can you sit there so calmly and admit it?"

"Because it is perfectly true," he said with equanimity.

Miss Violet Anstruther came back into the room, her eyes flashing, her hands clenched.

Pons was equal to the occasion. "Pray forgive me, Miss Anstruther. I must apologize for what must have seemed to you an inexcusable display of bad manners. But I trust you have seen that it had its *raison d'être*. Your poor father, for all his convictions, has all along had some doubts about certain of the cases before the bench of which he is Chairman, and, since the hand of Providence seems to have made other disposition of those acquitted, he has become obsessed with the conviction that he himself has been the instrument of Providence as he walks in his sleep.

"I observed as I came in this afternoon that your father was reading books about somnambulism and ventured a shot in the dark; it struck the bull's eye."

Our client sank down into her chair, bewildered. "Mr. Pons, I am dreadfully upset. I fail to see that you have resolved my father's doubts – rather the contrary," she said haltingly.

"My dear young lady, I have only begun to look into the matter. And now, if you will excuse us, I wish to pursue my inquiry elsewhere."

Miss Anstruther hurried to the vestibule where she had hung our outer clothing.

Pons paused at the threshold. "By the way, has your father ever left the house at night, to your knowledge?"

Miss Anstruther's face paled a little "I believe he did go outside once or twice."

Pons nodded, satisfied. "Your aunt left us for church," he said then. "I take it there are evening services?"

"Not always, Mr. Pons. My aunt is a retiring sort of woman. She spends much of her time on charities, hospital work, and in church."

Still Pons lingered. "I daresay the inquest on Mr. Dixon will have been held by this time."

"Yes, Mr. Pons."

"Can you give me the coroner's name?"

"Dr. Allan Kirton, King's Head Road. I could drive you there, Mr. Pons, if you wish."

"We'll walk or take a taxi, thank you, Miss Anstruther. I believe you should be at your father's call. Do not hesitate to reveal our little deception to him if he should question you."

We bade her good-evening and once outside walked toward the town.

"Pons," I said, once we were out of earshot of the house, "this is incredible. It is hardly likely that a man with Anstruther's convictions should have such deep-seated doubts as to give rise to such a delusion as you suggest."

"Is it not? I submit, Parker, that the fantasies of the human mind are virtually unlimited. Mr. Fielding Anstruther is an honourable, self-righteous man, satisfied with his way of life, confirmed in his convictions. But there are chinks in his armour, and that he could even for a moment entertain such a fantasy is proof of it."

"Do you intimate there is more to it than that?"

"That, in fact, Anstruther did take some kind of somnambulic action? It may be so. You're a medical man, Parker. Can you deny that the possibility exists?"

"Such things have happened," I was forced to admit. "But it is a well-known truth that no man asleep would perform any act which it is against his nature to do when he is awake."

"I am not adequately acquainted with Mr. Anstruther's nature," said Pons dryly, and thereafter said no more until we presented ourselves to Dr. Allan Kirton.

The coroner was a cheerful little man, pink-cheeked, white-haired, and voluble. He could hardly have been more than sixty years of age, and welcomed us with a lively manner.

"I certainly never expected to see Mr. Solar Pons in Ross," he said, bustling us into his house.

"A little challenge has been put to me here, Doctor," explained Pons. "I should dislike to flinch away from it. You may recall that my illustrious predecessor once undertook to solve a crime in the vicinity—in Boscombe Valley."

"I recall it, indeed I do, sir. But we have nothing of that sort to invite your talents."

"I am interested in Percy Dixon."

"A scoundrel."

"Dead."

"And good riddance."

"He died a natural death?"

"He did. Heart failure."

"No suggestion of violence?"

"Not a mark on him, other than what you'd expect."

"And what would one expect, Dr. Kirton?"

"Well, Mr. Pons, he'd been in the hospital for a day or two, and naturally there was the mark of a hypodermic injection."

"Only one?"

"Only one."

"I take it you required the hospital chart for the inquest?"

Dr. Kirton smiled. "I still have it here, Mr. Pons. Would you like to see it?"

"If I may."

"You shall."

He bounced out of his chair, retired into an inner room, and returned with the chart in question. He handed it to Pons, who gazed at it with narrowed eyes which did not conceal his keen interest.

"Hm! Blood pressure, 178/101. A trifle high."

"A bit. Consistent with his situation. He had been found unconscious in the street. They thought, of course, he'd been taken suddenly ill." The coroner chuckled.

"Pulse, 48. Low. Respiration difficult. Oxygen and ice-pack."

"He was only drunk, Mr. Pons. The fellow was a lout. No wonder his heart gave out."

Pons handed the chart to me. It represented nothing but the standard treatment for anyone brought into a hospital unconscious, with irregular respiration, pulse, and blood pressure

"You held the inquest on Hester Spring?" asked Pons then.

"Of course, Mr. Pons. A clear case of suffocation. Ironical, too. That was the way her baby died. She was cleared of culpability in that case, but chiefly because of Anstruther's softness."

"I take it there was no suspicion of foul play?"

Kirton shook his head vigorously. "Absolutely none. There was a complete absence of motive."

"I see."

"I'm afraid you're on a wild goose chase, Mr. Pons," said Kirton cheerfully. "Open and shut cases, both of them. Open and shut. Both inquests were purely routine matters. Oh, carefully done, sir—I saw to that. But routine, just routine."

After a few pleasantries, we bade Dr. Kirton good-night and withdrew.

At the Swan half an hour later, Pons made himself comfortable, while I sat to wait upon his inevitable question. It came presently

"You noticed nothing unusual about the hospital chart on Dixon, Parker?"

"Nothing. The treatment was standard. I looked in vain for evidence that he might have fallen—contusion, bruise, something of that sort; but since there was none, he plainly did not hurt himself when he fell."

"Otherwise, nothing?"

"Oh, come, Pons. I've read thousands of hospital charts."

"All the more reason for studying each with care," said Pons, with that infuriating air of having observed something that had escaped me, which was ridiculous, because I had looked over the Dixon chart with such care that I could have recited it from beginning to end if called upon to do so.

He subsided into thoughtful silence, and sat tugging the lobe of his left ear, his eyes half-closed. He sat thus for a quarter of an hour before he spoke again.

"An interesting problem. I shall regret leaving it."

"Ah ha! then it was as I said," I could not help pointing out. "I think, Pons, before you go, you ought to apologize to our host."

"I intend to do so," replied Pons. "No later than tomorrow breakfast. In the meantime, I have a few little inquiries yet to make. While you sleep, I shall go out into Ross and look about a bit more."

He put on his long grey traveling-cloak once again, bade me good-night, and slipped out of our quarters.

Early next morning we presented ourselves at the home of our client, who herself opened the door to us. At sight of us, her left hand flew to her lips, as if to prevent an outcry.

"Good-morning, Miss Anstruther," said Pons. "I trust your father is still at home?"

"He is, Mr. Pons. He's at breakfast with Aunt Susan."

"Good, good! I should like to speak to him at once. Have you disclosed our little deception?"

"No, sir. I lacked the courage."

"No matter."

She stood aside reluctantly. Pons, however, pushed into the house and made directly for the dining-room.

Our host of the previous evening looked his astonishment at sight of us. He would have come to his feet, had not Pons spoken.

"Pray keep your seat, Mr. Anstruther. I have come primarily to offer my apologies for my conduct at dinner last night."

"I am sure, Professor . . .," began the magistrate stiffly.

"Sir, my name is not Moriarty," interrupted my companion. "It is Solar Pons. I am not even a professor."

But my companion's name was evidently familiar to Mr. Anstruther, for, though his face paled at Pons's disclosure, his apprehension now gave way to a strange air of resignation.

"So it has come, Mr. Pons," he said quietly.

"Yes, sir. But hardly, I daresay, as you expected."

"A police inquiry?"

"A private investigation."

"They *were* murdered!"

"I have reason to believe so. But not by a man who might have walked in his sleep! You should discipline your conscience, sir. There might have been more murders - for they are technically that, even though they were conceived as executions - save that other potential victims were simply not available to the murderer. And there is, too, the suggestion that the compulsion toward murder had been satisfied with the death of the one person the murderer desired to see punished.

"The murderer had to be someone thoroughly familiar with the cases before you, with access to data perhaps not wholly available through the press or even in the course of the trials. It had to be someone who could slip into Hester Spring's house beside the church - or who could follow or accompany her in when Spring was intoxicated and smother her when she was too addled to save

herself—someone who could bide his time and run down Algy Burke, or who could do it on impulse after long design when the opportunity presented itself—someone who could pump a bubble of air into a man's vein without suspicion."

"A nurse," said our client.

"And last night, after learning that she was on duty at the hospital just before Percy Dixon was discharged, I took the liberty of making a close scrutiny of your sister's car. . . ."

"Not Susan!" cried Anstruther.

Our client stifled an outcry.

Miss Susan Anstruther, however, only smiled. "They deserved to die," she said with an air of triumph. "My brother always was soft-hearted. It's monstrous to realize how many criminals are being turned back upon society."

Mr. Anstruther gazed at her with an expression of absolute horror on his face, and our client, too, listened as if she could not believe what she heard.

"Those indentations on my car could have come from any source, Mr. Pons," said Susan Anstruther contemptuously. "And an embolism is hardly traceable. I'm afraid you would be chided if you came before my brother's court with such evidence, and he would direct a verdict of acquittal. Isn't that true, Fielding?"

Mr. Anstruther was speechless.

"You needn't answer," she went on. "And you couldn't sit on the case. But I don't think Mr. Pons has any intention of going into court with such a mass of theory unsupported by sufficient fact, or he would never have come here with his story. Do you, Mr. Pons?"

"There would appear to be another way to dispose of the matter."

"Committal to an institution," said Anstruther. "It can be arranged."

"Oh, no!" cried our client.

"Dear Violet would rather have a sensational trial," said the older woman. "But there won't be any trial. There are more madmen outside than in the institutions set aside for them. I'm tired—and now Henry's gone. . . ."

"Henry?" repeated Anstruther.

"Henry Archer—Dixon's victim," said Pons. "Miss Susan's 'very dear friend'—it was his death that fired your sister's zeal to become the public executioner."



Miss Susan Anstruther smiled bitterly, closed her eyes, and bowed her head.

"Sister! Sister! What have you done?" murmured Anstruther

Pons took out his watch. "If you will excuse us, we have just time to catch the train."

In our compartment, while the train sped toward London through the lovely land that is Herefordshire, Pons could not help pointing up my failure.

"It was not, you see, what *was* on the hospital chart that was important but what *was not*. The coroner distinctly mentioned having observed the mark of a hypodermic injection. Yet no record of such an injection appeared on the chart. One could hardly have expected Miss Susan to set down: 'One bubble of air, intravenously injected,' could one?

"Anyone might have had the opportunity to kill these three, but why then were other cases left untroubled if not because whoever murdered these three had more ready access to them than to others? Furthermore, Mr. Anstruther sat on benches elsewhere than in Ross; yet it was only in Ross that Providence seemed inclined to interfere with his disposition of his cases. Access was thus of prime importance.

"Miss Spring's house stood beside the church Miss Susan frequented. Susan worked in the hospital to which Percy Dixon was admitted and to which he had been admitted many times previously as a victim of *delirium tremens*, as she well knew. Algy Burke's death might have been the result of sudden impulse or it might have been planned; I submit, however, that it was impulse, because premeditation would have meant that Susan would have had to watch his place, and that might have made her conspicuous and thus directed suspicion to her. Perhaps Mr. Anstruther's fear of his own sleepwalking was only a defence mechanism to prevent himself from seeing what his sister did for he certainly knew that she disagreed vehemently with his concept of justice.

"The whole matter, however, was elementary, if singular. The only possible motive for altering the court's decisions to a series of harsher sentences seemed to be a compulsion to exact justice as the murderer conceived it. Such a compulsion rises easily in many of us when justice seems to go awry, but those who feel it seldom act upon it. Miss Susan Anstruther must have known it for many years.

but it took the murder of Henry Archer to drive her to action. What we shall never know is this—did she kill out of pure compulsion? or were the executions of Spring and Burke planned to conceal the death of Dixon, for which there existed a possible motive in her friendship—or romance—with Archer?"

He shrugged. "However, when it comes to people playing God, I'm not sure I don't prefer the Susan Anstruthers to the mass of do-gooders—the self-appointed humanitarians, the psychoanalysts, the sociologists. The Susan Anstruthers of this world at least eliminate people who are in all likelihood guilty of crimes against society, while the do-gooders all too often, if indirectly, by their freeing of dangerous individuals in the delusion that they have been 'rehabilitated,' eliminate the innocent."

The Adventure of the Mosaic Cylinders

"NO, PARKER," Solar Pons broke in suddenly, "while circumstances cannot lie, they are only too prone to misinterpretation."

"In this case," I began, lowering the *Daily Mail*, and paused. "But how the devil did you know what I was thinking?"

"That expression of smug satisfaction on your face could only have risen from a profound belief that the police are on the right track in their suspicion of Mr. Cecil Bowne's ward in Bowne's murder, an account of which you are manifestly reading."

"How elementary!" I cried. "Angus Birrell was the only one on the scene. The night of the murder was the servants' night off, which Birrell would know, certainly. Moreover, Birrell was Bowne's sole heir."

"Is that not a little too pat?" asked Pons with that annoyingly supercilious air he could so easily assume.

"And his story about running downstairs when he heard Bowne struck down is thin, very thin," I went on.

"I've read the newspaper accounts. Nothing is so blinding as the obvious! I submit that if Birrell had wanted to murder his benefactor, he could hardly have done so in a manner calculated to cast more suspicion upon himself."

"He's described as a hot-tempered brute of a man," I began again.

"Dear me! How we do embroider what we read! I do not recall that anyone called him a 'brute.' "

"Very well. I retract it."

Pons smiled. "If there has been any evidence of disagreement between the men—or any immediate altercation—it has escaped me," he went on. "And the newspapers have an annoying habit of painting persons and places in accordance with their private prejudices. But it is idle to speculate about the matter when we shall shortly hear from Mr. Birrell himself."

"You're going to Birdlip?" I asked, astonished.

"At the moment, no." Pons drew a crumpled paper from the pocket of his purple dressing-gown and dropped it into the coal scuttle as he crossed to the mantel for the abominable shag he used

to fill his pipe. "I've had a wire from Detective-Sergeant Howard Burnham of Birdlip. He and Birrell are on their way to Number 7B. I expect them at any moment."

Pons had just begun to fill the room with the pungent odour of his pipe when the outer bell rang.

"Ah, I fancy that will be our visitors," said Pons.

In a few moments, Mrs. Johnson knocked at the door to our old quarters and, at Pons's invitation, showed our callers in. Detective Sergeant Burnham was a rotund man of fifty or a little more, clean-shaven, with cherubic cheeks and merry eyes and a generally florid complexion. Angus Birrell, however, was a dark-haired, dark-browed young man to whom a frown seemed to come naturally. He had almost black eyes, which smouldered with ill-concealed anger, it seemed to me, and a mouth that could only be described as petulant. He was athletically built, broad of shoulder, with powerful arms.

Detective-Sergeant Burnham performed the introductions, adding, "Mr. Birrell here insisted on coming. Mr. Pons, and I'll admit I was glad to take the opportunity, as you might say, sir. I don't know what to make of it—murder's not what you'd call common at Birdlip."

"Is murder ever common, Sergeant? Pray be seated, gentlemen." Pons turned to our client. "Harrovian, I see," he said, eyeing the colours woven into Birrell's tie.

"Yes, Mr. Pons."

"Self-employed, Mr. Birrell?"

"You put it very considerably."

"Engaged in writing—and with a pen rather than a typewriter. I recommend the latter; it is no source of calluses."

Our client smiled, a trifle wanly. "I never found a machine conducive to creative work."

"We've read the papers, of course, Mr. Birrell, but let us for the moment assume that we haven't. May we hear your story?"

"Certainly, Mr. Pons. I suppose the best place to begin is at dinner last evening, when Mr. Bowne told me he had just had a letter inviting him to an urgent appointment last night. He didn't say why or where he was going; that wasn't his custom. Directly after dinner, I went to my quarters. I had a book I wished to read, and I wanted to listen to a programme on the B.B.C. It was the servants' night off, and I heard them go soon after I left the table."

"One moment," interposed Pons. "At the moment that Mr. Bowne mentioned having to go out, was anyone else in the room?"

"No, Mr. Pons."

"Thank you. Pray continue."

"Well, Mr. Bowne was upstairs and down, getting ready to go. He stopped once at the threshold to ask what I was reading. I said, 'Eliot.' 'I'm afraid he's beyond me,' he said. 'When I was a student we didn't read stuff like that.' He laughed. He said I shouldn't be surprised if he came home quite late. Then he went downstairs for the last time. He went into his study, which is just below my quarters. Then he left the house by the French windows, which open out of the study. He was on the way to the garage for his car.

"He couldn't have got far from the house when I stepped over to open a window. At that very moment I heard a dull sound — like a fall — then a groan. I thought of Mr. Bowne at once and called out to him. He didn't answer, though I was convinced he couldn't have reached the garage in so short a time. I ran down immediately and out of the house the way he had gone.

"Mr. Pons, I found him lying on the walk next to a little grove of yews. I thought I heard someone running — then the noise of a motor starting, but I can't be sure because, of course, I didn't think of murder. There was no reason why I should. We live quiet lives. We surely had no enemies. I thought Mr. Bowne had had an attack of some kind. It was the most natural thing for me just to pick him up and carry him back into the house. It wasn't until I got into the study that I noticed he had been struck violently on the side of his head. My clothes were bloodied where his head rested.

"I was horrified. I laid him on a divan in the study. I ran to the telephone at once and called Dr. Fielding of Birdlip. Then I returned to Mr. Bowne. He was still breathing. As I unbuttoned his overcoat and loosened his collar, he opened his eyes. I don't think he saw me clearly. He tried to speak. I listened very closely, but what he said didn't seem to make very much sense."

"But you *did* hear what he said, Mr. Birrell."

"Yes, Mr. Pons. He said this: 'Go . . . read . . . box . . . sovereign . . . moor tell you . . . ask moor . . . read . . . linnet start from . . . nest . . . don't think badly of me, Angus.' That was all, Mr. Pons. He died in my arms."

Pons had copied down Bowne's last words as Birrell repeated them. "Curious, curious," he muttered, his eyes dancing. "What do

you think Mr. Bowne meant by his dying adjuration to you, Mr. Birrell?"

"Mr. Pons, I haven't the vaguest idea. Mr. Bowne adopted me as a boy when my father, an old friend of his, died. He has been more than a father to me, and as you know—since it has already been widely bruited about," our client added bitterly, "I am his sole heir. I'm aware of what many people are thinking. Even my profession is against me, since writers are forever in need of money."

"Have you been published, Mr. Birrell?" asked Pons.

"Yes. In Mr. Wyndham Lewis's *Blast*, Mr. Lindsay's *London Aphrodite*, and in the *American Little Review*."

"Ah, an *avant-gardist*," said Pons.

"Mr. Bowne was sympathetic, Mr. Pons."

Pons nodded thoughtfully and changed the subject. "I've observed that the newspapers refer to your late benefactor as 'retired.' No mention is made of the position from which he retired. Can you tell me?"

"When I was a boy, Mr. Pons, he was off for indefinite lengths of time. Irregularly, I always thought he was in some kind of business which required him to travel. Since that time, he has spent his time in his garden and about his grounds, which were modestly extensive."

" 'Since then,' you say, Mr. Birrell. How long is it, approximately, since Mr. Bowne retired?"

"Fifteen years or so."

"He would then have been forty, since he was fifty-five when he was killed last night, according to the press reports."

"I was then ten," said our client.

"Mr. Bowne was evidently a man of independent means."

"I'm not familiar with his affairs. To the best of my knowledge, he received payments of some kind by post."

"By the month or the quarter?"

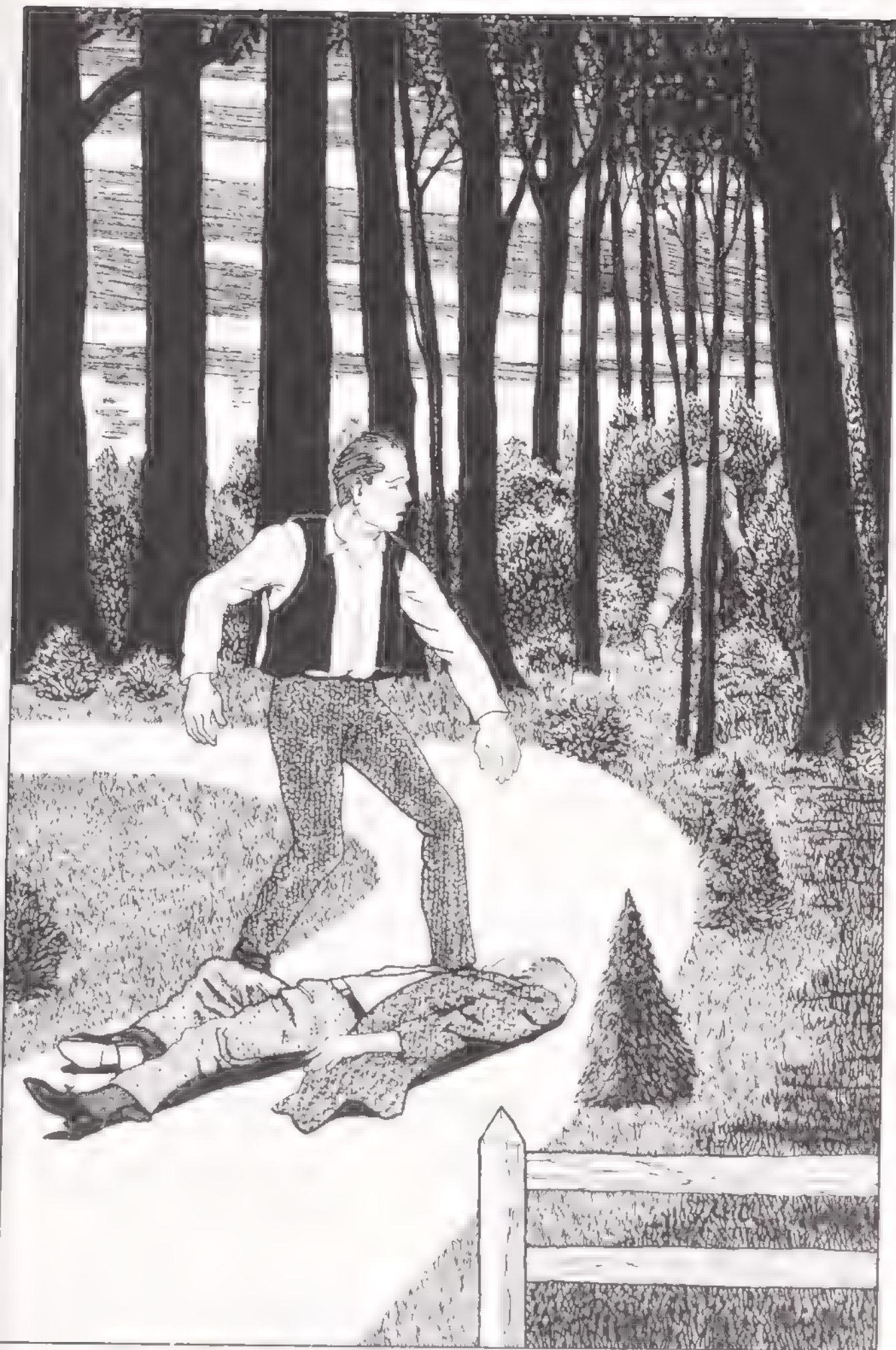
"Neither. They were not at all regular. Sometimes they came twice a quarter, sometimes not for four to six months."

"Did Mr. Bowne at any time offer you an explanation of such remittances as he received?"

"No, sir," said our client somewhat stiffly. "There was no reason why he should do so."

"Quite so. How did he customarily spend his evenings?"

"He frequented a hotel in Birdlip on some evenings. He played whist with a group of neighbours one evening a week. The rest of his time he spent reading. He was a great reader, Mr. Pons, and



even if he had little sympathy for experimental prose and verse, he had sound tastes, very sound. Hardy, Fielding, Dickens, Galsworthy, Keats, Shakespeare - all of them. And he was always very much interested in history, archaeology, anthropology, and such subjects. He had quite a library and never lacked a book to read."

"We could do with more people of such tastes," observed Pons. "You aren't aware of any enemies he might have had?"

"No, Mr. Pons. How could he have made them? I've asked myself that a hundred times since last night. He never gambled. He was a conservative, solitary-minded country gentleman. That he should have been struck down so wantonly fills me with the greatest confusion. It is monstrous. It is a base crime without a motive."

"Say rather without an obvious motive," replied Pons. "Time and events may provide one. Could anything have been taken from his pockets in the interval between your call from the window and your arrival beside him?"

"If so, I wouldn't know what it was. His wallet was intact; as far as I know, nothing had been taken from it. He wasn't in the habit of carrying more than ten pounds at the very most; he had eight on him. But there would hardly have been time to rifle his pockets, Mr. Pons. Believe me, I lost no time reaching him."

At this point, Detective-Sergeant Burnham cleared his throat and caught our client's eye.

"Oh, yes, there's one thing should be mentioned," Birrell said then. "The thing in his pocket. Mr. Bowne wore an overcoat. . . ."

"It did seem on examination that the pockets of the overcoat had been looked into," said the Detective-Sergeant in a flat, reportorial voice. "That it did. One flap up and part of the lining pulled out."

"But there was this thing in the pocket of his jacket," Birrell continued. "Detective-Sergeant Burnham has it."

The Detective-Sergeant reached into his pocket and produced a strange little cylindrical container. It appeared to be made of wood, with mosaic decorations on top and bottom. The letters of the alphabet quite jumbled, decorated the sides in twenty-four columns and seven circular rows. He handed it to Pons, whose eyes lit up with pleasure at sight of it.

"Mr. Bowne's?" asked Pons.

"I've never seen it before," answered our client. "I couldn't testify that it belonged to him."

"Evidence suggests that it did," said Burnham phlegmatically. "It was carried from the house; it could hardly have been put into his

pocket outside. His overcoat was buttoned; it hadn't been unbuttoned except by Mr. Birrell here after Mr. Bowne was carried into the house."

Pons turned it about in his fingers. He held it to one ear and shook it. It bore every evidence of being a solid block of wood cut into cylindrical shape and ornamented by some carver's intricate art.

"It's old," offered Detective-Sergeant Burnham. "You can see it's worn."

Pons nodded. He glanced again at our client. "Yet you've never seen this object in Mr. Bowne's possession or in the house?"

"No, sir," Birrell flushed a little. "I'm not in the habit of looking about where it's none of my business. I never was. Mr. Bowne brought me up to mind my own affairs."

"Commendable," murmured Pons. "What, precisely, was the general relationship between your benefactor and yourself?"

"Each of us went his own way. I suppose you could say we were good friends and good companions."

"You discussed each other's daily occupations?"

"Not to any very great extent, Mr. Pons. We talked about the weather and the garden. He was always interested whenever I placed something with a magazine. And very often when he received one of his remittances we celebrated by going out to dinner."

"Let us return for a moment to the message your benefactor received which, he told you, summoned him to an urgent appointment last night. Who customarily took in the post?"

"I did. I always have work on submission to the magazines, and I naturally wait word on it."

"And yesterday?"

"I took in the post, Mr. Pons, as usual."

"Was there anything in it which might have been the message Mr. Bowne said he had received?"

"I've thought about that, sir. I don't think there was. Mr. Bowne had only two letters. One was a tradesman's bill. The other was a notice of expiration from a magazine to which he subscribed."

"So that a message such as he described must have been delivered by hand?"

"It would seem so."

"Yet Mr. Bowne was preparing to use his car to go to the appointment. Would he have done so for a meeting in Birdlip?"

"No, Mr. Pons. He liked to walk too well."

"The meeting then was at some place beyond Birdlip."

"I took it that it was - from his plan to use the car and from his saying he might be late."

"The question is," put in Detective-Sergeant Burnham, "will you lend us a hand, Mr. Pons?"

"I'll be happy to do so, Sergeant. I have had three whole days without a single problem to tax me, and I am near to suffocating of boredom. One thing - I would like to retain this little cylinder until tomorrow."

"Certainly, sir."

"Then you may expect us at the Royal George in Birdlip by noon tomorrow. Failing any word from you, Sergeant, I will wait upon Mr. Birrell at the scene of the tragedy directly after luncheon."

After our visitors had taken their leave, Pons said dryly, "The circumstances seem to have taken on a different complexion."

"On the contrary," I said heatedly, "only if you accept Birrell's story at face value."

"Detective-Sergeant Burnham, who has evidently known Birrell for some time, put enough credence in his account to come to London with him. The Sergeant seems sound enough."

"If I have not mistaken the trend of your inquiries, Pons, the message Bowne received was intended to lure him to his death. Yet Birrell, by his own admission, was the only other person to know of Bowne's appointment."

"Not quite," said Pons softly, "there was also the person who wrote it. I think we may safely conjecture that the author of the message was not the man whose name was signed to it."

I would have protested further, but Pons held up a restraining hand.

"In matters of this kind, Parker, one must begin either by accepting the available evidence or by rejecting it. Plainly, you reject it. Let us start by accepting it. Our client is clearly not a fool. Fools are not commonly published by the magazines in which his work has appeared. He is a man of intelligence, a trifle bitter at the world and somewhat frustrated because his ambition to make a name for himself as a writer is not being fulfilled soon enough to please him - a fate common to thousands of men and women who take up the pen in the mistaken delusion that writing is an easy way to earn a living. I submit that he is far too intelligent to commit so bungling a crime. Had he wished to eliminate his benefactor, I rather think he would have worked out an ingenious scheme. Something in the line of a death trap to be sprung when he was

miles away - perhaps in London - surely that would be truer to his nature."

"Perhaps I'm prejudiced against him," I conceded.

"Patently. His very manner offends you. Moreover, you have scant patience with scribblers of modern ephemera, and the newspaper accounts have helped make up your mind. This little matter promises unexpected ramifications to come. At the outset, there are several points about it which intrigue me. Mr. Bowne's dying message, for one. . . ."

"Which we have solely on the word of the principal suspect," I put in.

Pons ignored me. ". . . The intruder on the scene at whose presence our client only hinted - mark it well; he has not *claimed* someone was there, but only that he *thought* someone had been running, a poor defence if such it was intended to be - and, finally, this little object. What do you make of it?"

So saying, he tossed it to me. I examined it carefully. It was light to hold. Because of the mosaic decoration, I could not determine of what wood it was wrought, but I thought it was yew. It was smooth to the touch, testifying to its age.

"Hold it to your ear and shake it," instructed Pons.

I did so. "It whispers!" I cried.

"Does it not!" exclaimed Pons. "There is manifestly something in it - I should make it paper or some such substance."

"Then it is hollow!"

"An elementary deduction, Parker. If I am not mistaken, it holds the key to the mystery."

"How can you say so without more than such a casual glance?" I protested.

"Why, that, too, is elementary, if we accept our client's account. Mr. Bowne had an appointment. He carried no briefcase, book, paper - nothing of that sort - nor any large sum of money. But he *did* carry this most unusual box. It is not too much to suppose that his appointment concerned this box in some fashion of which we have yet to learn."

"What is the thing?"

"Why, it's a sovereign box." He took it from my fingers, and began to turn the lettered rings, which I saw now were not wrought of a solid piece of wood.

"Ah, it comes apart then," I said.

"Must it not if it contains something?"

Pons sat for some time working at the mosaic cylinder. He turned

one ring after another, repeatedly. He turned several together, clockwise and counter-clockwise. By watching him closely, I concluded that he was attempting to arrange some of the letters on the box to spell words - or at least one word - from top to bottom. It seemed to me an utterly futile task and I said as much.

"Why, there must be close to two hundred combinations which are possible. Do you mean to try them all?"

"If need be. However, I fear you underrate the task. Since there are twenty-four letters in each ring, and seven rings, the possible combinations would, of course, be the seventh power of twenty-four."

"That would be in the millions!" I cried.

"To be exact," continued Pons, unruffled, "4,586,471,424."

"It would take you a lifetime to make them all!"

"I submit, however, that the combinations forming words are somewhat more limited - only a preponderance of seven-letter words in such languages as are written in Roman letters. We shall begin, therefore, with relatively common words. This cylinder is intricately and carefully wrought by a craftsman whose hand has long been stilled. Let me concentrate."

Half an hour passed. I had long since returned to my perusal of the evening papers when Pons cried out.

"*England!* The word is *England!*" cried Pons triumphantly.

I came to my feet and strode to his side even as the mosaic cylinder came apart in his hands. He had clearly found the combination which unlocked the cylinder by spelling the word *England* downwards. A vertical slot was thus brought into line in the yew-wood rings which formed the inner lining of the box, and this allowed ivory teeth which held it together to be withdrawn. The sovereign box lay in two parts before Pons - the outer shell, consisting of inner and outer rings and top, and the bottom, attached to a hollow cone down one side of which projected the ivory teeth.

Pons upended the hollow cone. A little curl of paper fluttered out. Pons snatched it up in his lean fingers and in a trice had it spread out before him.

What was written on the paper in somewhat faded ink was this:

*The linnet starts from its nest
And goes high up into the west*

Nothing more.

I stared at Pons in astonishment. "What on earth does it mean?"

His eyes danced with delight. "Patience, Parker, patience. We shall just see. But does this not touch a chord or two in your memory?"

"Surely this is riddle enough without your propounding more," I cried.

Pons smiled. "Pray indulge me. Let us consult Mr. Bowne's dying words." He drew over the pad upon which he had written what our client had reported Bowne had said. "Ah, yes here we are 'box . . . sovereign' well, Parker, this is a sovereign box; I am confident that we can safely overlook the involuntary inversion in Mr. Bowne's laboured speech. And here we have 'linnet start from . . . nest.' " He rubbed his hands together in a gratified manner. "We seem to have made a start, Parker."

"But what is the significance of these lines?" I pressed him.

"It would appear to be a rhymed couplet."

"Aha! I see. And our client is a poet."

"I don't recall that he admitted to writing poetry, though your deduction isn't out of place, in view of his liking for Eliot. I suspect, however, that the point is irrelevant; I fear Mr. Birrell would have little regard for this couplet as poetry."

"Is it in code, then?"

"If so, a most ingenious one. Only a comparatively brief message could be hidden in these two lines. Yet I am convinced it is a message of some kind. It is plainly this which he was expected to bring to his appointment and which carried Bowne to his death instead. It follows, therefore, that someone else knew of the existence of this cylinder; if a name was signed to the letter Bowne received, then two other people at least knew of it, since the signature would certainly have been that of a man Bowne would expect to know about it."

"That presupposes the involvement of two people our client at least does not suspect."

"I fancy Mr. Birrell has lived a long while in a world of his own creation," said Pons cryptically. "Now, let me see what can be done to solve the riddle of this couplet."

So saying, he pushed the mosaic cylinder aside and bent to the paper.

Though his light burned late that night, Pons gave no indication next morning that he had solved the puzzle of the paper; indeed, I saw by his knit brows and clouded eyes that he had not, and when I

asked him, as we boarded a train at Paddington for Cheltenham at seven-thirty, he said only, "It is not a formal code."

With that I had to be content, for he offered no further comment, either immediately or during the three and a half hour journey through the lovely spring countryside on our way to the Cotswolds. He sat in our compartment shrouded in silence, while his hawk-like face was host to a variety of lively emotions - from time to time a suggestive smile touched his thin lips, sometimes his eyes laughed; at other times he sat with his eyes closed, the fingers of one hand fondling the lobe of an ear. He was obviously in no mood to brook interruption, and I held my own counsel throughout the journey to Malvern Road Station in Cheltenham.

There at last Pons seemed to come to life. He began to talk animatedly of the picturesque stone cottages with their mullioned windows and stone-slabbed roofs we were destined to see in the Cotswolds, and he expressed his pleasure at seeing again Leckhampton Hill, which was on our course to Birdlip two miles out of Cheltenham. But of the problem in hand, he uttered not a word, much to my disappointment.

We took a cab at the station in Cheltenham and set out for Birdlip, which was only a short drive from the city. Except for exclamations of delight at some particularly attractive stone frontage or vista, Pons sat in silence. On our right rose the rampart of the great escarpment, a ridge of impressively beautiful hills, made all the more so by the soft green of the beech woods which began to show on their near slopes at Birdlip.

The Royal George at Birdlip was a small hotel of but eight beds. Pons took a room on the top floor, from which the windows afforded us a magnificent view of the Cotswold country. At Birdlip and south from there, the escarpment was less imposing, and perhaps because of this, more beautiful, with beech woods and the hills rising skyward on the one side of Birdlip, and on the other the descending wolds, which lay like a dream with clusters of houses, groves, streams, and lovely vales.

"We are in the midst of antiquities here, Parker," observed Pons.

"As old as that mosaic cylinder?" I asked, not without a touch of sarcasm.

"Far older. At the very site of this hotel there was a posting station during the Roman occupation, and Roman remains abound throughout the region. Even older the Dobuni who ruled on

Cotswold before the Romans have left their traces and artifacts, sparingly found, to be sure—like the pieces once belonging to their queen now to be seen at Gloucester Museum."

"It may come as a surprise to you," I replied with some asperity, "but I have a slight acquaintance with British history. Considerably more than I have of the problem in hand."

Pons smiled wintrily. "You overrate my poor powers if you suggest I know much more of this intriguing problem than you, Parker. I have certain suspicions, true, but knowledge, no. Come, let us take a little lunch and be on our way."

After lunch, Pons inquired of the receptionist whether any message had been left for him. None had. Thereupon, with ostentation unusual for him, he asked to be directed to the home of the late Cecil Bowne. He seemed to take unwonted pleasure at the attention he stirred by mention of his name, and his manifest intention of pressing an inquiry into the murder.

"You excelled yourself," I could not help saying when we were on our way on foot through the village.

"Ah, Parker, one can never tell upon what shores the ripples of village gossip may touch," he observed. "These are dark waters."

The object of our search lay on the south edge of Birdlip. It was a country house, evidently remodeled and brought up to date, for all the untouched outbuildings were of the native stone and obviously very old. There were several of these, in a semicircle, well apart one from another, between the house and the edge of the village. Immediately beside the lane as we came to it was the garage; beyond it stood a dark grove of yew trees, and beyond this grove the other outbuildings, curved around the house at a respectable distance from it. The house itself stood away at a slight angle from the yew grove, and the French windows through which our client's benefactor had walked to his death were plain to see, for the area from the windows to the grove was roped off, evidently by the police, and very probably for Pons's examination.

Pons entered the grounds and made directly for the grove along the limestone walk from the garage. A small pool of dried blood marked the spot where Bowne had been struck down. It could be seen on a stone in the walk just opposite a thick-boled yew, which indicated where Bowne's murderer might have stood—if Birrell's testimony could be accepted without question.

Characteristically, Pons ignored the walk entirely and gave all his attention to the edge of the grove. First he fell to his knees at the

base of the old yew next to the site of the attack on Bowne; then he took out his magnifying glass and scrutinized the trunk of the tree, from the bark of which he removed some infinitesimal threads or hairs and put them into a small envelope. He came around the tree just as our client emerged from the house to greet us.

"I'm happy to see you," said Birrell.

"And I to find that the good Sergeant hasn't yet put you in irons, Mr. Birrell," said Pons.

"Will you come in, gentlemen?" Birrell turned to lead the way back to the house. "I should tell you, Mr. Pons—I've not been idle this morning. I got hold of Mr. Harris, Mr. Bowne's solicitor, and the two of us went to his bank to make some proper inquiries there. I trust I interpreted the direction of your questions last evening correctly, sir?"

"Ah. You asked about the source of Mr. Bowne's income?"

"Exactly. Mr. Pons, apart from the few dividends on investments, really of little consequence, that he received, for the past fifteen years my benefactor's principal source of income has been his old schoolmaster, the late Cornelius Muir."

"Muir," murmured Pons thoughtfully. "Muir." He stood for a moment at the French windows. "Did he not once publish a monograph on Britain's Roman antiquities?"

"That's the man, Mr. Pons. Mr. Bowne was a student of his at a small private college in Bristol when Muir taught there. History and archaeology were his subjects, I believe. Then Muir turned to collecting and retired from the teaching profession. Evidently Mr. Bowne was of some continuing service to him. Only," he added, speaking with hesitation, "I'm hanged if I know when it could have been, for I can't recall that he ever visited Muir. At least, he didn't do so to my knowledge. Yet the remittances came with fair regularity in their uncertain pattern over a decade and a half."

"Were they in equal amounts?" asked Pons.

"That's a rather perplexing aspect, sir—they varied greatly. Naturally, I thought at once—and so did Mr. Harris—that Muir might possibly have made some investments in his name for his former student. The great variation among payments leaves considerable doubt as to this."

"What were the limits of that variation?"

"From two hundred to three hundred and seventeen pounds," answered Birrell. "I don't know much of financial matters, investments and the like, but it seems to me highly unlikely that there

exists any stock or bond issue which would pay off such varied amounts in such short and irregular periods of time. I'm under the impression that dividends are seldom paid oftener than annually or semi-annually – rarely quarterly – but these payments were made without any plan at all except their very marked irregularity. That seems to have been the rule from the beginning."

"Interesting," said Pons crisply, his eyes twinkling.

"But come in, please."

Our client stood aside while Pons and I entered the study of the house, a somewhat cramped room all available wall space of which was occupied by deep shelves packed with books. A glance at the titles confirmed our client's statement that his late benefactor's literary tastes were very sound; almost nothing of a lighter nature, except a single novel by Compton Mackenzie, met my eye. A divan against one paneled wall, slightly recessed under shelving, was evidently the spot where Cecil Bowne had died the previous night, for a white cloth poorly concealed a bloodstain.

Pons stood just inside the French windows, saying nothing. His keen eyes darted here and there. I saw him glance toward the ceiling, then toward the threshold opening on to the hall and the stairs beyond, and deduced that he was computing the time it would have taken our client to rush from his room to the side of his stricken benefactor.

Presently Pons spoke. "I don't recall your mentioning anything about a weapon last night, Mr. Birrell. Was one found?"

"No, sir."

"The inference being that the murderer made off with it?"

"I think so. Dr. Fielding gave it as his opinion that the weapon used was either a poker or an iron bar, and he will so testify at the inquest two days hence."

"If, as circumstances suggest, the mosaic cylinder or sovereign box found in Mr. Bowne's pocket was kept on the premises, where would your late benefactor have been likely to keep it?"

Our client strode across to the wall above the divan and removed a section of books from a shelf at shoulder height, revealing a wall-safe behind.

"Here, sir."

"You have the combination?" asked Pons.

"No. But it will surely be found among his papers in his box at the bank."

"If Mr. Bowne had a deposit-box, what was he likely to keep here?"

"I don't know, Mr. Pons. I've never looked into it, even when it stood open on such occasions as I happened to come into the room when he was at it. Papers, perhaps. Or such things as the sovereign box."

"Let us return to the remittances your benefactor received for so long a time," said Pons then. "When was the last of them received?"

"Five weeks ago almost to the day, Mr. Pons. A week before Muir died of a heart attack, quite suddenly."

"In what amount?"

"A hundred pounds."

"There have been no payments since then?"

"None."

"Nor any communication from Muir's estate?"

"None, Mr. Pons. Muir was a widower; there were no children. His nearest relative is, I believe, a cousin in Canada. I really don't know the circumstances relating to the disposal of his estate, but I suppose these matters are in the hands of his solicitors. Inquiry could be made in Gloucester, where he lived."

Pons nodded absently. From the pocket of his jacket he took out a slip of paper which he handed to our client.

"Have you ever read these lines before, Mr. Birrell?"

Our client glanced at the couplet discovered in the mosaic cylinder. His face was expressionless, save for a faint air of disapproval which came into it presently. "Never, Mr. Pons. This is meant to be a rhymed couplet, but as poetry, it's bad, very bad. The metre is abominable." He did not ask how Pons had come by it, but his eyes betrayed a lively curiosity which Pons had no intention of satisfying at the moment.

"They mean no more to you?"

"No." His brows came down darkly. "Should they?"

"If they should, you would know it, Mr. Birrell."

Our client glanced at the couplet again, then, baffled, handed it back to Pons, who reached into his pocket once more, took out the mosaic cylinder, and opened it. He restored the couplet to its hiding-place and closed the sovereign box again.

Birrell watched in fascination. I could not be positive, but it seemed to me his astonishment was too genuine to have been feigned.

"Mr. Pons, what does it mean?"

"At this moment, I myself am not sure, though I'm beginning to draw certain inferences from it," answered Pons.

Our client made no attempt to press Pons further. "Is there anything you would care to examine here, sir?"

"I should like to take a look at your benefactor's recent correspondence," said Pons. "We should determine, if possible, with whom his appointment was made on the night of his death."

"Oh, that. I can spare you the trouble," said our client, striding over toward a desk in one corner of the study. "I think this is what you're looking for."

He handed Pons a small fold of paper, evidently torn from a common writing-pad. I looked over his shoulder as he read the message typewritten on it—

"Bowne: We'd better get together before it's too late. How about Tuesday evening next, 8:30 or 9:00, my place? You can get around easier than I can these days. Reed."

Pons shot a glance of inquiry toward Birrell.

"I believe that would be Austin Reed at Tewkesbury. Mr. Bowne had a very sparse correspondence. Apart from Muir and the customary business affairs about taxes and investments, he wrote to only three people, and these only occasionally - to Reed, a cousin of his named Carroll in Edinburgh, and a Mr. Sidney Hawes of Bishop's Cleeve."

"If you have their precise addresses, I'll take them down."

"Certainly, Mr. Pons."

Our client, not without some obvious bafflement, copied down the addresses Pons wanted from what appeared to be the late Mr. Bowne's address-book.

"Muir's, too, if you don't mind," said Pons.

"But he's dead!"

"Just the same—I may have need for it."

As he handed the list of addresses to Pons, our client shook his head and said, "I must confess, Mr. Pons, your methods leave me more puzzled than ever."

"At this juncture, Mr. Birrell, an investigation must proceed blindly. I think we have finished here, at least for the time being. Once we've returned this interesting little cylinder to Detective-Sergeant Burnham, I shall consider what line of inquiry to follow. . . . By the way, Mr. Bowne's murderer was a slender man, very agile, about five feet, three inches in height, wearing on the night of the murder what I take to be brown tweed."

Pons thereupon thanked our client, and we took our leave. Birrell stood with astonishment on his features, but I could see also that he was disappointed and plainly felt that he was being locked out of Pons's investigation. His dark looks followed us from the house to the lane.

Through tea, which Pons had sent up to our quarters at the Royal George, he sat absorbed before his notes, his eyes narrowed and thoughtful. But from time to time a thin smile played about his austere face, and his eyes danced. At last he leaned back.

"In the light of such discoveries as we have made, Parker, what do you make of it?"

"Precious few discoveries we've made," I retorted. "And what the devil did you mean by telling Birrell his benefactor's murderer was a short, slender man?"

"Oh, come, Parker—that is surely as elementary a deduction as I could possibly have made. Even you could have made it. If a man leans against a tree and his shoulders, judging by the brown tweed threads left on the rough bark, come to roughly four feet, three inches, and there is scarcely an imprint to mark where he waited, it's hardly a feat to conclude that he was slight of build and short of stature. That little matter, however, is relatively inconsequential. Let us consider Bowne's dying statement again. Does it not now take on new light?"

"I see very little light, Pons."

"Come, come, it isn't as bad as that. Look at his first words—'Go . . . read . . . box sovereign. . . .'"

"Ah, that clearly means our client was intended to read the couplet in the mosaic cylinder," I said.

"An excellent example of the misinterpretation of circumstances," observed Pons dryly. "It could hardly have meant that, when Bowne might have shown his ward the message at any time in the course of several years. No, I fancy it meant, 'Go to see Austin Reed.' Now then—'moor tell you . . . ask moor.' I submit that what Bowne said was 'Muir,' in the confused state of his mind forgetting that Muir had died. Then he repeated 'read,' which, following so close upon 'ask Muir' must certainly refer to asking 'Reed.' The quotation from the couplet is obvious, of course. What do you make of his dying adjuration, Parker? 'Do not think badly of me, Angus.' Is that not a curious final statement?"

"It suggests that Bowne had been guilty of some wrong."

"Toward Angus?"

"Possibly."

"I submit that Bowne's adjuration referred to what Angus Birrell was destined to learn if and when he followed his benefactor's dying instructions. Our client himself has said he hadn't the vaguest idea of what Bowne could have meant, and stressed the fact that Bowne had been very good to him. Moreover, Birrell is his sole heir." Pons shook his head. "I think we may definitely conclude that Bowne's reference was toward what was to come, not to anything which had already affected their relationship."

I conceded that this made sense.

"Now let us turn for a moment to this note so casually making an appointment which Bowne evidently never thought of not keeping. What do you deduce from it?" Pons tossed it to me as he spoke.

I read it carefully once more. "For one thing," I said cautiously, "it is entirely typewritten, including the signature. Anyone could have written and sent it."

"Certainly Reed did not," agreed Pons. "Go on."

"Reed had reason for haste. There is a note of urgency in the letter."

"Capital, capital, Parker! I am happy to see this development in your ability to rationalize. Go on."

"So that if Bowne unhesitatingly responded to it, he, too, must have recognized that urgency. It must then have been a common emergency."

Pons's eyes danced with delight. "You do me proud, Parker! Quite so. Pray continue."

"Reed writes that Bowne can get around easier than Reed can. So Reed must have been ill or unable to travel far, and Bowne must have known this for he had not questioned the source of his letter."

"He corresponded with him."

"Well, that seems to be the sum total of what's to be made of this," I said, handing the note back to him.

He folded it and restored it to his pocket. "Except for one thing. The urgent matter which inspired both the note and Bowne's willingness to accept it was almost certainly the death of Cornelius Muir. Something subsequent to that may have heightened its urgency. 'We'd better get together before it's too late.' Too late for what—if not the solution of the riddle of the mosaic cylinder? I submit, Parker, that Reed also owns a portion of the 'poem' begun with the couplet in Bowne's cylinder. By the same token, we had better lose no time in getting to Reed. I fancy we can hire a car and

driver to take us up the Severn Valley. I shall be happy to see Tewkesbury again; it is surely one of the most attractive towns in all England."

A lithe, short-statured young man answered our knock at Austin Reed's door. He held the door ajar only a little way and looked out at us suspiciously, his hard blue eyes clearly hostile.

"Mr. Reed?" asked Pons.

"Can't see him. He's abed. Very ill."

Pons took from his pocket the note sent to Bowne, wrote across the back of it, "Must speak to you about this. Solar Pons," and handed it to the reluctant young man guarding the threshold.

"Take this to Mr. Reed at once," he commanded.

"I'll do it, but it won't do any good," said the young man, in a somewhat more courteous manner, now that he had caught sight of Pons's signature. "I'm sorry to seem so ungracious but we've been upset by the burglary and all. I'll take it to him. Just step inside and wait. I'm Harold Reed, his son."

He opened the door to us and walked away.

We stepped into the hallway and looked around. The house seemed to be reasonably well appointed; it was not a wealthy man's home, but it was certainly not a poor man's dwelling. But we had little time to examine our surroundings, for young Reed's quickened footsteps sounded very soon.

"Come in, gentlemen," he said. "Come in. Your note excited Father."

He showed us into a bedroom, where a gaunt man of sixty-odd years lay in what seemed to me a dying condition. He was stubble-bearded for lack of a razor, and his condition was fully as grave as his son had hinted. Bony fingers trembled on the note Pons had sent in, and as Pons bent to retrieve it, the sick man spoke.

"Not mine. Not mine," he said.

"Father means he didn't write this message, sir," said young Reed.

The sick man turned feebly toward his son. "Box . . . Harry. Get me . . . box."

A little impatiently, the younger man replied, "Dad it's gone. Don't you remember? It was stolen." He turned to Pons and explained. "He's talking about a little curio he had here. He set great store by it, though I never could see that it had any value. Father

always said that little box assured our future."

Pons took Bowne's mosaic cylinder from his pocket. "Like this, Mr. Reed?"

Young Reed's eyes widened. "Yes, sir. That's it! Where did you find it?"

"No, Mr. Reed. This is not it, but only one similar to it. It was found on the night before last in the pocket of a murdered man. It had belonged to him."

"Alike as two peas," said the younger Reed, staring at the sovereign box as if unable to take his eyes from it. Indeed, his fingers trembled with excitement or eagerness as he held out his hand as if to take it for a moment before he withdrew it.

"Your father's was stolen," pressed Pons. "When?"

"A week ago, sir. Someone entered the house one night. Father had been in hospital in Gloucester for a while, and I was there part of the time—living in Gloucester, to be near him—and when we got back here the day after I went down to bring him home, we saw someone had broken in by the back door."

"When was this?" interrupted Pons.

"Ten days ago. We couldn't find that anything had been taken but when Father asked for his curio, it was gone. Since it was here when I left for Gloucester, it must have been stolen while I was gone. I asked the nurse about it, but she hadn't touched it—hadn't even seen it, according to her, and that's probably true because Father kept it behind some books on the top shelf of his little library."

The elder Reed began to speak suddenly, brokenly, with gasping effort. "Hawes first . . . blinded . . . Bowne next. . . . Then me. . . . Blinded—all blinded. . . . Sworn to secrecy. . . . Never told. . . . None of us. . . . He bound us. . . . We pledged him. . . . Counted on us. . . . Trusted him. . . . Hard work . . . careful . . . by night. . . . Harry—Harry—the box. . . . The box!"

"Dad, it's gone," said his son patiently.

"Lost. All lost," murmured the older man.

"Semi delirious," I could not keep from pointing out. "What he says is probably dredged up from the past but has some meaning for him."

"And for us," said Pons sharply, motioning me to silence.

The old man lay with his eyes closed now, breathing heavily from the exertion of speaking at such length. The fingers of his right

hand twitched in a grasping motion, as if he dreamed of attempting to seize hold of some object.

"The box Harry," he muttered again. "All lost. . . . All gone. . . . Her diadem. . . . Cross . . . red and the green. . . . Great queen! . . . I promise on my honour as an English gentleman - to speak no word . . . to speak no word. So are we . . . bound . . . we four. . . ." And again he half raised up in bed and cried out, "Harry—Harry . . . the box!"

Then he fell back, utterly exhausted.

"Pons, we dare not stir him farther," I protested.

Pons nodded absently. His eyes strayed from the old man in the bed and fell upon a typewriter in an alcove nearby.

"I wonder, Mr. Reed," he said to the younger man, "whether you would be so kind as to insert this false message into your machine and type to my dictation."

"Certainly, Mr. Pons."

Pons handed him the message Bowne had received, watched him insert it into the typewriter, and then dictated, "Not written by Austin Reed—Now just sign it, Mr. Reed."

The younger Reed did as he was asked, whereupon Pons bade him good-day, and we withdrew.

Outside once more, I said, "Well, that was surely a fruitless visit. Except for the matter of a second cylinder, we heard nothing but the disconnected ravings of delirium. Did you expect to turn up another sovereign box?"

"Say rather I was not surprised to learn of the existence of a second. As for not learning anything—alas! Parker, you disappoint me grievously. We have just learned all."

"Pons! You cannot mean it!"

"I was never more in earnest. Those disconnected ravings, as you called them, unlocked the secret of the mosaic cylinders. And even a cursory glance at what Reed typed at my dictation tells us that message and dictation were written on the same machine." He looked at his watch. "It is late in the day, but I think we had better go on to Bishop's Cleeve and look up Sidney Hawes."

We reached our destination at dusk, but though we found the house of Sidney Hawes without trouble, it was dark save for a small night-light. Nevertheless, Pons's knock brought a response from within, and the turning on of a stronger light.

"Who is it?" came in an uncertain voice.

"A friend of Sidney Hawes," answered Pons.

"Come in, then. The door's not locked."

Pons opened the door and we walked in to find ourselves confronting a young man in an easy-chair. It was manifest at once why he had not answered Pons's knock in person. He wore a heavy bandage on his head, and another on one arm. His legs were covered with a dressing-gown, despite the relative warmth of the evening, and it was not unlikely that he had difficulty getting about.

"Accident," said the young man cheerfully. "I expect you've not heard. I'm Tom Hawkins, his nephew."

Pons introduced himself and me. It amused me to see that Pons's name apparently meant nothing to Hawkins, a fact which was bound to touch Pons's vanity.

"Glad to know you, gentlemen. I'm sorry not to be a better host—but there's a decanter on the sideboard if you'd care to help yourselves. My uncle's man's out and I find it a little hard to get around the way I'd like."

"And Mr. Hawes?" asked Pons.

"My uncle—God rest his soul!—died in the accident, Mr. Pons. And him only fifty-six, too! I was driving the car—it was that, most likely, saved me from being thrown about when we went out of control and left the road."

"How long ago, Mr. Hawkins?"

"Three weeks, sir."

His cheerfulness had given way to a more proper gravity now; he bit his lip and sighed. "My uncle was a fine man, sir, in every respect."

"Badly injured?"

"Oh, no, sir. It wasn't that alone. It was just as much his heart. His heart had been bad, and I expect the shock of the accident and the scare were too much. He'd had a bad fall on the stairs just a day or two before, too. I don't know how the accident came about, and that's a fact. Something to do with the brakes, the garage told the police—I can't understand it. The car was all right only the day before. Then that day my uncle decided sudden-like to go down to Birdlip and call on an old friend there. We set out, and got almost to Cheltenham when the brakes gave out and away we went down the slope and off the road."

"We thought Mr. Hawes was to be found here," I said.

"I'm staying here only until my cousin—his son—can get home

from Calcutta. It's his place now, and I expect I'll move on as soon as he comes."

"Well, I won't say I'm not disappointed, because I am," said Pons in an almost ingratiating manner. "But perhaps you can help me, Mr. Hawkins."

"Any friend of my uncle's has a claim on me, sir."

"Did your uncle mention the name of the man in Birdlip he meant to call upon?"

"Bowne, I think he said."

"And did your uncle ever own a curious little sovereign box decorated with letters of the alphabet and some mosaic scrollwork?" asked Pons bluntly.

Hawkins stared at him, astonished, for a full moment without reply. Then he said, "If my uncle had ever owned such a box, I'm sure he'd have told me about it. I've lived with him ten years, ever since his first heart attack—my cousin Horace couldn't come home, you see, and I was free to come—and there were precious few secrets he kept from me. My uncle kept his sovereigns where they still are, sir—in the bank at Cheltenham. I don't think it likely that such a box as you describe is in this house."

"Perhaps he kept it, too, in a deposit-box," suggested Pons.

"I have access to his bank box, sir." He shook his head. "But what is this sovereign box?"

"A curio, Mr. Hawkins. An interesting curio which may have some bearing on a little problem I am at present investigating."

A light broke suddenly upon Hawkins's thin face. He sat up a little straighter, so that his dressing-gown fell away a little from his spare frame. "But, of course—it's Mr. Solar Pons, the London detective!" he cried. "Well, sir—I *am* honoured! But what could you have wanted with my uncle?"

"I had hoped to ask him questions which unfortunately you cannot answer," replied Pons. "Apparently there were a few little secrets Mr. Hawes kept from you. Perhaps his son, once he reaches England, may have the answer to those questions. Thank you, sir, for your kindness to two travelers. We'll be on our way back to Birdlip."

"I'm sorry I can't see you to the door, gentlemen. But as you've been able to make your way in, you'll find your way out. Good night!"

Pons walked out in profound silence and got into the car for the journey back to Birdlip. It was not until we were well on our way

that he broke the thoughtful meditation in which he had been plunged.

"I dislike coincidences, Parker, however much I know them to occur — much more frequently than we recognize. I submit that this chain of events is more than coincidence."

"Which chain of events?"

"That begun with the death of Cornelius Muir, followed by the fatal accident which eliminated Sidney Hawes, the curious illness of Austin Reed, together with the burglarious entry of the Reed home, and the murder of Cecil Bowne. These events suggest nothing to you?"

"Should they?"

"We have four men who were associated in some venture," Pons replied thoughtfully. "They were sworn to silence. Unfortunately — and fatefully — one of those men broke his pledge and precipitated the events which followed upon Muir's death."

"Ah," I said, "this is a familiar pattern. They robbed a business or a bank and have been systematically dividing the loot."

Pons laughed heartily. "I thank Providence for such little touches of humour as you manage to inject into the problems which come our way, Parker, I do indeed."

"It has all the aspects of lost treasure," I cried hotly.

"Lost — or found," said Pons, sobering. "It does indeed."

He said no more, and we drove on in deep silence through the aromatic, night-bound countryside. Pons with his eyes closed against any distraction which might take his thoughts from the perplexing riddle of the mosaic cylinders. Nor did he venture a hint of what he had been thinking when we reached the Royal George, save only to remind me that in the morning we would go to Gloucester "to inquire into the role the late Cornelius Muir played in this little drama."

With this, he turned in and fell asleep at once.

Pons was up and about sometime before I woke next morning. I had just finished breakfast when he came into the hotel, ready for the journey to Gloucester, which was but ten miles away. He wore one of those self-satisfied smiles I invariably found peculiarly annoying. He tossed a folded envelope at me. His name had been scrawled across its face.

"This was left for me during the night, Parker," he said.

The envelope was addressed to "Mr. Solar Pons" in broad penciled script, and had the look of having been written in haste

No address appeared under Pons's name, suggesting that the note had been delivered by hand. The message inside was succinct and pointed.

"Don't meddle in what doesn't concern you. Go home, Mr. Nosey Pons." It was signed: "A Friend."

"I fancy our quarry is frightened," observed Pons. "That classic signature is all too revealing. I have invariably found that only one who means one ill signs such communications 'A Friend.' I daresay we are uncomfortably close to the heart of this little matter."

"This doesn't have the sound of an ignorant fellow."

"Only an irritated and fearful one. He is literate enough. Bear in mind that all the principal actors in this little entertainment have college backgrounds. Mr. Muir, ex-professor, and three students at his college. Does not that suggest anything to you?"

"I'm afraid not."

"Dear me, morning is not your best time, Parker. But come, let us be off," he said, starting away. "I have had opportunity, early as the hour is, to ascertain the name and address of the solicitor in charge of Muir's estate pending the arrival of the cousin from Canada, who would appear to be Muir's heir. Our business is first of all with Mr. Tooker this morning."

Mr. Norman Tooker proved to be a frosty gentleman of some seventy years, who had an office in Eastgate Street. He was expecting us.

"Ah, Mr. Pons," he said with dignified formality as we were announced and shown in, "and Dr. Parker. I've been waiting for you ever since the police advised me to expect you. What can I do for you?"

"I took the liberty of asking the police, with whom I am co-operating in an inquiry, to give you notice of my coming. I'm afraid I may have to ask you to answer some questions which may seem to you somewhat unethical," said Pons.

"Ah, involving a client," said Tooker, visibly drawing into himself.

"The late Cornelius Muir."

Mr. Tooker brightened a little. Manifestly, a dead client was not quite in the same category, ethically, as a living one. "A fine man. I knew him well. He was more than just a client. An old friend, I might say. Surely you can't expect me to believe that he had a part in any crime?"

"We are looking into the death of one of Mr. Muir's former

students, and we have reason to believe there may be a connection, however remote, between the death of Mr. Muir and that of Mr. Bowne."

"Ah, the Birdlip assault case," murmured Tooker. "I make a habit of reading news of crime, Mr. Pons; I'm not uninformed. Besides. . . ." And here he hesitated, looking strangely at Pons.

"Do go on, Mr. Tooker."

"I was about to say that in discharging the wishes of my late client, I was on the verge of posting Bowne an envelope left for him by Mr. Muir."

Pons's eyes danced. "May I see it?"

Tooker selected one of three envelopes from a rack on his desk and handed it to Pons. "As you see, I addressed my communication to his estate. The envelope I referred to is inside."

Tooker had not yet gummed down the flap of his envelope. Apart from the customary notification to the addressee, covering the contents, there was but the envelope to which Tooker had referred. It was addressed, I saw at a glance, in a hand that bore no resemblance to Tooker's signature appended to the covering letter - presumably, therefore, in the script of the late Cornelius Muir.

Pons held the sealed envelope between the thumb and forefinger of one hand. "Do you know what this contains, Mr. Tooker?"

"No, sir. I don't. This was left with Mr. Muir's instructions to forward unopened to the addressee."

"Let us just examine it."

Pons carried the envelope over to the window and held it up to the light. A smile touched his lips.

"Be good enough to take this down, Parker," he said, and read, slowly. "'Thence by a mile, and turns to face To where the setting sun last lays its golden grace.' "

"Mr. Pons, this is highly irregular," protested Tooker.

"I daresay it is. Murder, however, is even more so. Do you understand these lines, Mr. Tooker?"

"No, sir. I don't."

"Your late client was also evidently a poet."

"I believe more than one professor has fancied himself a creative writer, Mr. Pons. A poet, eh?"

"The lines are a couplet. They are written in what I take to be Muir's hand."

"I'm afraid it means nothing to me."

"It was evidently intended to mean something to Mr. Bowne, and," added Pons, pointing to two other envelopes which Tooker had prepared, of similar size and appearance, "also to Mr. Sidney Hawes and Mr. Austin Reed."

Tooker snatched up the envelopes in question, took out the inner envelopes, and hurried over to the window with them. He held them up against the pane, one in each hand.

"They are the same lines, are they not, Mr. Tooker?" asked Pons.

"They are indeed. Mr. Pons, I've heard of your ratiocinative powers. . . ."

"Tut, tut, Mr. Tooker. This was not ratiocination at all, but simple conclusion following inevitably from the premise that these three gentlemen and Muir were associated in some venture of common interest. But let us pursue this further," he went on, as Tooker returned to his desk. "Are you familiar with your late client's accounts?"

"Of course, Mr. Pons."

"Some five weeks before his death, he paid Mr. Bowne by cheque the sum of one hundred pounds. Ah, I see by your face that this strikes a chord in memory. Tell me, did he not also pay identical sums to Mr. Hawes and Mr. Reed at the same time?"

"He did."

"I submit, Mr. Tooker, that for the past fifteen years your late client made identical payments at irregular intervals to all three of these men, payments ranging all the way from a hundred to three hundred pounds."

"Mr. Pons, I would have to check the figures, but I believe you are substantially correct."

"Why were these payments made?"

"I can't tell you that, Mr. Pons. I don't know."

"Perhaps you can tell us how Mr. Muir came by his income?"

"Mr. Muir was quite wealthy. He left a considerable estate, of which the death-duties alone will take many thousands of pounds."

"Did he live on interest and dividends, Mr. Tooker?"

"He was a well-known collector of antique and ancient artifacts. His house is cluttered with them even today, Mr. Pons, though he has been systematically selling his collection for a dozen years. There are cheques here from Sotheby's, from the Parke Bernet Gallery of New York, and from other sources."

"When was Mr. Muir's last sale made?"

"Let me see." Tooker opened a fat folder on his desk, put on his pince-nez, and scrutinized a sheet of paper, his lips working, his brow furrowed. "Here it is," he said presently. "Six weeks and three days ago. A jeweled Dobuni artifact to Sotheby's, who paid him a hundred and ten pounds."

Pons nodded with ill-concealed satisfaction. "Do you think it might be possible to get into Muir's house?" he asked then.

"I'll take you there myself," said Tooker, and led the way to his car.

The late Cornelius Muir's house stood in spacious, well-landscaped grounds on the bank of the Severn north of Gloucester. Its modest and relatively unpretentious exterior in no way prepared us for the crowded rooms inside. From the entrance as far as one could see, and from room to room, the house was crowded with antiques and artifacts, the sight of which wrung a cry of delight from Pons. They were of all kinds—Roman, Celtic, Druidic, Dobuni, of Viking and Norman origin—indeed, it was patent at but a glance that Muir's home was little more than a private museum which must have represented an extensive investment.

"Has an inventory been made, Mr. Tooker?" asked Pons, when he had looked about.

"Not yet. People from the Gloucester Museum have been retained to do it, however." He asked anxiously, "Will you want a copy?"

"No, but I suggest that the police may. Frankly, Mr. Tooker, I didn't come here to view these splendid relics of bygone ages. I have a fancy to see more of Mr. Muir's verses, if possible."

Mr. Tooker looked dubious. "I don't know if I can help, Mr. Pons. This field of his labours was unknown to me until today. Unless, perhaps—his notebook?"

He crossed to a bookshelf in the study, where we were then standing, and took from it a looseleaf notebook which he brought back to Pons.

"He kept a good many notes and figures here, Mr. Pons—nothing vital in the same sense that his cheque-book was vital"—here he permitted himself a wintry smile, "but of matters close to him."

Pons was already looking through the book, saying nothing.

"It dates back quite a number of years," offered Tooker

"Sixteen," said Pons dryly, having observed a date on the page

bearing the signature of the notebook's owner. "He had some culinary interests, I see by these recipes. Here are some references, too, to a textbook he hoped to write, and a partial outline. Some addresses. Ah, here we are. Here at last is one complete poem. I'll just detach this sheet, if I may," said Pons, suiting his actions to his words, "and post it back to you when I've done with it."

Tooker's expression suggested that he was convinced by this time that my companion was little short of being a madman. Though he held his own counsel, his keen eyes gave him away. He shot a glance at me, he gazed hard at Pons, who now held Muir's notebook out to him, and then barely nodded to sanction Pons's removal of the sheet, which Pons had already unceremoniously folded and stuck into his pocket.

"And now, what next, Mr. Pons?" asked the solicitor, when he had restored the notebook to its niche. He spoke in a tone of voice which plainly indicated that he would not have been surprised at any wild request Pons might make, and I confess I shared something of his feelings, for Pons seemed bent upon anything but pursuit of a murderer.

"Nothing further, Mr. Tooker. You've been most forbearing and helpful."

"The ways of detectives are quite beyond a mere solicitor," said Tooker, not without an edge of sarcasm in his voice. "I hope I've helped you along the road to the identity of Mr. Bowne's murderer."

"Ah, I didn't come for that. I've been quite certain of his identity for some little while. No, I came in search of the final piece of this little puzzle, and I fancy I have it here." He touched his pocket.

We left a sadly baffled solicitor behind us, and, I fear, Pons rode back to Birdlip with an almost equally baffled companion at his side, for he offered not one word of explanation.

Once back at the Royal George at a late luncheon, I could restrain myself no longer. "What did you mean, Pons, when you told Tooker you knew who Bowne's murderer was?"

"Perhaps I should have said that I am reasonably sure of his identity," replied Pons mildly. "The only pending problem would seem to be that of establishing sufficient legal evidence to convict him. But perhaps we'll be able to trap him. We shall see."

"You cannot mean it!" I cried.

Pons took from his pocket the sheet he had abstracted from

Muir's notebook. "It should be as plain to you as it is to me, once you've read that, Parker, and considered it in the light of the known events of the matter," he said.

I read Muir's poem in silence—

*The linnet starts from its nest
and goes high up into the west
against the thunder and the crag,
amid the haunts of fox and stag
to where the lightning-wounded beech
points toward the channel's reach
thence by a mile, and turns to face
to where the setting sun last lays its golden grace*

"You will remember that I postulated the lines discovered in Bowne's mosaic cylinder were but part of a larger unit," said Pons. "Here at last we have that complete unit."

"I'm inclined to agree with our client that the whole is as bad, as poetry, as the part."

"It was hardly meant to be a poem except to those readers who were not intended to read it. It is a suitably constructed riddle."

"Have you solved it?" I asked bluntly.

"Not yet. But I fancy it is not insoluble. I submit, however, that, since Bowne's cylinder contained the first couplet, those owned by Hawes and Reed contained the next two, one in each. Muir alone held the last, without which the preceding three were useless. Does it not impress you as significant that Muir had left instructions for the final couplet to be mailed to his three students after his death?"

"He wanted each of them to have the means to solve the riddle," I said. "That is surely as plain as a pikestaff."

"Not each alone," said Pons, "but as a trio in place of the old quartet. None of the three could solve the riddle without the others. I put it to you, Parker, that the whole thing is now as clear as spring water."

"It is not to me."

"Think on it," said Pons.

"If you're so sure of the identity of the murderer, why not arrest him?" I demanded.

"I prefer to wait until he comes to me," he said enigmatically.

I stared at him, bereft of speech.

"In the meantime," he continued jauntily, "what do you say to a little tour of the Cotswolds? This afternoon, perhaps. Or tomorrow?"

I shook my head. "I can't stay away from my practise so long, Pons," I protested. "I must return to London."

"I'm sorry to hear it," said Pons. "Rejoin me when you can. I know how you like to be in on the conclusion of these little adventures you delight to chronicle." He stroked his lean nose reflectively with one forefinger and gazed calculatingly at the ceiling. "Shall we say not later than three days hence?"

On the morning of the third day after, I arrived at the Royal George to find not only Pons, but also Detective-Sergeant Burnham and our client waiting on my arrival.

"Ah, Parker, you're just in time for an excursion into the hills," cried Pons.

"After three hours on the Great Western, I'm in no mood for a hike," I answered.

"Come, come — the game's afoot. You wouldn't miss it if you were down with pneumonia." He drew a copy of a Cheltenham newspaper from his pocket and handed it to me. "You may not have seen this in the fastnesses of London."

The paper was dated two days before — the day after I had taken leave of Pons to return to London — and was folded to a box on the front page, where Cornelius Muir's poem was reproduced in black type under a brief paragraph headed, "Archaeologist Was Secret Poet."

"I recognize your hand in this, Pons," I said.

"With the connivance of the police," replied Pons, with a bow toward Detective-Sergeant Burnham.

"Yes, Mr. Pons said it was necessary," explained the Sergeant, "so we had it put in all the papers Cheltenham, Gloucester, Tewkesbury, Winchcombe, Cirencester, Stroud — the lot of 'em. I'm not much for poetry myself, but even I can see that Mr. Muir was a bird-lover. Lot of those folks here-about."

"Let us be on our way," said Pons, glancing at his watch. "We have a short distance to go before we leave the car."

Birrell drove. We went in a northeasterly direction from Birdlip, deep into the hills. I soon lost track of our whereabouts, since I was not familiar with the region east of Cheltenham, but we drove for

only a short distance before our client eased his car into an ar-boured lane where it would be unseen from the road. From this spot, Pons led the way on foot. The May morning was wonderfully sweet with the perfume of spring flowers and the pungency of foliage, particularly strong after a light rainfall during the night, and the wold through which we walked was surely the most idyllic of that countryside.

We were ascending a rather barren slope when Pons paused suddenly and swept his arm dramatically upward. Before us lay a mounded hilltop, crowned by a rough circle of scrubby bushes.

"That, gentlemen," said Pons, "is known locally as the Linnet's Nest."

"I see," said our client keenly, "and I suppose, Mr Pons, we go west from that point — 'high up'?"

"We do, indeed. That nearby promontory is called Thunder Crag." We resumed walking as Pons spoke. "I had some difficulty finding 'the lightning-wounded beech,' primarily because, in the interval of a decade and a half, nothing but the jagged stump of it was left. The channel of the 'channel's reach' is, of course, the Bristol Channel, toward which evidence indicates that the beech once leaned."

Detective-Sergeant Burnham expressed his bewilderment. "I'm not sure I know what you two are talking about," he said.

"Sergeant, the couplet found in the sovereign box, which I showed you, was the beginning of a set of directions for reaching a certain place in the escarpment. Since this couplet was also the first couplet of the 'poem' written by the late Cornelius Muir, it is reasonable to assume that the poem constitutes the complete directions. Acting on that assumption, I found successively the places mentioned in the four couplets, and, at last, the goal which Muir sought to conceal from all but the three men who knew what to expect when they reached it."

Detective-Sergeant Burnham looked but little less bewildered; however, he did not press Pons further.

We had now passed the Linnet's Nest, and were advancing upon Thunder Crag, which had a forbidding aspect even in sunlight, and must certainly have worn a menacing appearance in heavy weather. Beyond it lay a little beech wood, then again open slopes, and there, standing alone on a little knoll, an ancient beech stump beside which, when he reached it, Pons came to a stop and pointed.

"The Bristol Channel lies in that direction. From this place by a mile we shall see a high promontory facing westward—a place 'where the setting sun last lays its golden grace.' We have a mile to go."

We came at last to the west-facing cliff which was Pons's goal. We had walked, I judged, close to five miles from the car, though we might have driven closer to the Linnet's Nest had not Pons deemed it inadvisable. The actual cliff face was not high up from where we stood near its base; it rose from the escarpment in an area that was singularly barren save for a growth of scrubby trees immediately at its base.

"These trees, I submit, were purposely planted," said Pons.

"In this desolate place?" cried Birrell. "Why?"

"Why—if not to conceal from any prying eye what lies behind them?"

"Earth and oolite, Mr. Pons?" asked Detective-Sergeant Burnham. "They have no value hereabout, sir."

"But what lies behind has value, Sergeant."

So saying, Pons descended to the base of the cliff, which lay at the bottom of a slight declivity, doubtless formed by erosion over many years. He parted the branches carefully and disclosed a spill of oolite and earth which had evidently been drawn back and away from the base.

"My work, gentlemen," he said curtly.

Before us was a break in the wall of stone; it had the appearance of having been brought about by erosion a long time ago. It might have seemed the entrance to the cave, were it not that the hard wall of stone that was the cliff could be plainly seen a little way in. Yet it was to this wall that Pons went without hesitation, beckoning us to follow.

As we pressed close, the apparently solid face of stone opened inward. A cavern yawned beyond.

"Your lantern, Sergeant," said Pons, stepping to one side.

Detective Sergeant Burnham flashed a light into the cavern, revealing scattered bones, and what appeared to be burial chambers in the walls.

"A barrow!" exclaimed our client.

"This is more than an ordinary barrow," said Pons. "If you are thinking of such well-known barrows as Notgrove or Belas Knap or Uley Long Barrow—no, this is decidedly different. This was a

burial place used exclusively by rulers of the Dobuni quite apart from the customary artifacts to be expected here, there are jeweled pieces which have a value transcending what they would bring as antiquities. There were, I surmise, a great many more pieces. There are bronzes, pottery, flint weapons, and the usual crude primitive pieces, suggesting that this burial place was usurped for the Dobuni rulers from an earlier race. Moreover, there is nothing to show that the Romans ever found this place, for there are no Roman signs. It must indeed have seemed a treasure trove when Cornelius Muir stumbled upon it!

"But we have little time in which to explore it. We need not do so now. Unless I am very much mistaken, publication of Muir's 'poem' will certainly not have been missed by our quarry, who has been looking for it so actively, and he in turn will lose no time finding this place."

"Particularly," I could not help adding, "since Mr. Nosev Pons is also looking about."

Pons chuckled. "We shall wait for him here. It is now well into the afternoon, and I fancy he will wait only long enough to mark the sunlight's fall upon the stone above. We'd better leave the entrance slab a trifle ajar to prevent the air from going stale. Let us just make ourselves comfortable and bear in mind that silence is the rule."

We waited for an uncomfortable two hours before the sound of a rattling stone from outside gave warning of someone approaching. Even so, it took a while longer for our quarry to discover the door behind the grove of trees. But at last his scraping footsteps came nearer - then there was a tapping on the slab, as with a hammer. Then the stone swung open. A short, slender man stood there, silhouetted against the fading daylight behind him.

"Mr. Thomas Hawkins, I believe," said Pons, as Detective-Sergeant Burnham's lantern shot its light into our quarry's face.

Hawkins's response was a furious curse. Then he dodged back, crashed through the trees, and ran fleetly around the face of the cliff.

"After him!" shouted Detective-Sergeant Burnham.

We tumbled out of the cave, broke through the trees, and gave chase, our client in the lead.

Our pursuit, however, was not destined to last long. Hawkins was running in unfamiliar territory, and though he was nimble and artful, he came at last to the edge of a steep-walled coombe.

Skirting it, with Birrell not far behind him, Hawkins's foot turned on a loose stone. With a wild cry of despair, Hawkins plunged over the edge.

When we reached the place where he had vanished, we looked over and saw him lying motionless below. And when at last we made our way to the spot, it was evident that his neck had been broken.

"I'm not yet quite clear about the details of the puzzle, Pons," I said, as we sat in our compartment rattling through the night toward London a few hours later. "One or two little things escape me."

"Small wonder," said Pons handsomely. "The matter, though essentially elementary, had puzzling ramifications. We came to it by the side door, so to speak. But it can be reconstructed quite simply.

"Muir stumbled upon this rich treasure some fifteen years ago. Needing help, he enlisted the aid of three of his former students, whom he knew well enough to realize that he could trust them even to the extent of aiding him in a basically illegal act—though, as you know, raiding the ancient barrows was a popular pastime of the nineteenth century. He blindfolded them—you'll recall Reed's delirious mutterings—and took them to the place, which was evidently so filled with treasure that he could not remove it without assistance.

"The agreement among them was obviously to permit Muir to sell off the pieces as portions of his collection, which no one was likely to question, and to divide the proceeds four ways. The figure Mr. Tooker quoted us in regard to his last sale, suggests as much, since it amounts approximately to four times the last payment Bowne received.

"At the same time, Muir agreed to reveal the location of the place to them all together when he died—he intended to will it to them, even though much of the treasure had been removed to his home. To do so, he devised the ingenious method of composing a series of couplets telling them where the barrow was, and enclosing one couplet in each cylinder he gave to his partners, with the provision that the final couplet be posted to each of them at his death, thus making it necessary for all three to meet in order to solve the riddle.

"What he failed to realize was that one of the three might divulge

enough of the secret to endanger the success of the plan — and even their very lives. It was obviously Hawes who told his nephew. It was Hawes who died first following Muir's death. He died in a contrived accident. Hawkins admitted to knowing that his heart had been bad; he may have made earlier attempts to frighten him, of which we know nothing. Hawkins had no other motive but to disarm us when he made an attempt to throw us off in regard to the cylinder and it was most certainly he who subsequently managed to slip a warning to us at the Royal George. It was a calculated touch to type the message to Bowne on Reed's typewriter when he broke into Reed's home.

"He came within one couplet and the last of learning the secret — he had his uncle's, he had stolen Reed's, and he murdered Bowne to steal his cylinder, knowing he would have it on his person when he left to keep the appointment Hawkins had made in Reed's name.

"An entertaining problem, Parker. Would there were more like it!"

The Adventure of the Fatal Glance

"SURELY THAT WAS A SHOUT," said Solar Pons, coming to a pause and turning.

We stood on the moor road at Askrigg Town Head and, looking back down the precipitous descent toward houses rising on both sides of the street against the hillside, we saw a cyclist coming toward us.

"Isn't that Constable Lambert?" said Pons. "We had a game of darts last night at the Crown."

"I hope you'll remember you came to Askrigg for a holiday," I said, pointedly.

"We've had three days without a single thought but of resting in this Yorkshire country," said Pons. "Very trying days, if I may say so. I'm never certain why I let you talk me into these holidays from time to time. But here he is."

Constable Lambert came up and slid off his bicycle. He was a young man, whose plain, freckled face customarily wore an expression of almost apologetic honesty. This morning there was trouble in his eyes.

"I wondered when I caught sight of you, Mr. Pons, whether I could persuade you to come along," he said, and added "It looks like my first murder, sir."

"Ah," said Pons sharply, his eyes lighting up. "Let us hear about it."

"I don't know much, and that's a fact," replied the Constable. "But we can talk while we walk. It's just up ahead, at Thornhill Hall."

He started forward as he spoke, wheeling his bicycle beside him: we fell into step. The road curved and dipped here between walled pastures and meadows on its way toward the moor above Askrigg, passing the last few isolated houses on the edge of the village, a group of larches, and one or two groves of bushes and small trees. Our destination was visibly the country-house set back from the moor road among trees perhaps half a mile out of Askrigg.

"It's the Squire, Mr. Pons," resumed Constable Lambert. "Dr Scarr telephoned me—says he's been murdered."

"You've not seen him, then?" asked Pons.

The Constable shook his head. "I've only just now had the call. Hawgood found him lying dead in the study. Hawgood's the Squire's man. Miss Emily called the doctor. Dr. Scarr saw right off it was a case for the police."

"Did he say how the Squire was killed?"

"Well, he did, sir—but I don't quite understand it. Doesn't seem to have been shot—or anything, as you might say, simple. As nearly as I could follow Dr. Scarr, the Squire was killed by a pair of binoculars."

"Capital! Capital!" murmured Pons. "Something new under England's sun. Who would have had a motive?"

"Mr. Thornhill wasn't a popular man," said the Constable dryly. "Who *wouldn't* have had a motive would be easier to say. There's one man likes him—that's Hawgood; he swears by him, for all that the Squire got young Hawgood six months for petty theft. They do say even his own daughter can't stand him, and village talk has it that his late wife died to be free of him. There's Fred Mason, a gardener he sacked without reference—and Arthur Robson—the Squire knocked him down a week ago or thereabouts—oh, there's plenty with motive, Mr. Pons. The Squire was a hard man, and not one to cross."

We reached the gate opening on to the flagstone walk that led to Thornhill Hall. Constable Lambert pushed it ajar and stood aside for Pons to walk through.

Our approach had been observed, and the door was opened to us by a square-jawed man with the expressionless face of a long-time servant. Though he had been expecting only Constable Lambert, nothing but the flickering of his glance toward us betrayed his surprise at facing three men instead of one.

"Good-morning, Hawgood."

He closed the door behind us, then came around to lead us. "Right this way, if you please, gentlemen."

From the broad hall, Hawgood led us to the right, through a small sitting-room into what was manifestly the study. There Dr. Scarr waited—a burly, ruddy-faced man in his middle years, standing like a sentinel on guard beside the cloaked mound which was the body of Squire Thornhill.

"Most shocking thing I've ever seen," he said, after introductions had been exchanged. "Man cut down like this in his prime! I've

survived the war, gentlemen — never saw anything like it."

He bent and flicked the cloak aside, disclosing the body.

It was that of a robust man of middle age clad in riding-clothes. He lay partly on one side, with his head at an abnormal angle. Save for the awkwardness of his position, the Squire might have been sleeping. It was only at second glance that I saw the lines of blood from the mutilated eyes. Not far from the body lay the instrument of death — a pair of binoculars, from the eye-pieces of which projected needles of at least four inches in length.

"Will you examine him, Doctor?" asked Dr. Scarr.

I dropped to my knees for a closer look. But there was nothing more to be seen than had already been disclosed, and it was perfectly evident that the dead man had come to his death by means of the lethal binoculars. Since the body lay just before open French doors, it was logical to assume that the Squire had taken up the binoculars for a glance outside, and that, very probably at his manipulation of the focusing ring, while the glasses were at his eyes, the mechanism within had released the fatal needles which had plunged into his brain through his eyes. I said as much.

"Horrible," muttered the Constable.

Pons came forward now and in turn examined the body and the binoculars. He looked toward Hawgood.

"Have you seen these before, Hawgood?" he asked.

"No, sir."

"They were not Mr. Thornhill's?"

"No, sir."

Pons moved away from the body, his keen eyes darting here and there. He made a quick circuit of the room, pausing to pick up a little rectangle of paper on the carpet near the fireplace, and stopping finally at the hearth, where he crouched to look at the remains of a fire.

"Paper was burned here this morning," he said, flashing a glance at Hawgood.

"I burned nothing, sir," said Hawgood at once.

Pons came back to where we waited. "You found the body, Hawgood?"

"Yes, sir. I came into the room and saw him."

"Mr. Thornhill could hardly have died without sound. You heard nothing?"

Hawgood paused uncertainly, biting at his lower lip.

"Come, come, man—what did you hear?"

"I couldn't say, sir—but I thought *after* I found him that I had heard him cry out. Just once."

"I see." From his pocket Pons took the rectangle of paper he had picked up. "Have you seen this before, Hawgood?"

The rectangle was a piece of stout linen card on which had been written: *From an admirer.*

"No, sir."

"Does it not seem likely that it came with the binoculars?"

"I don't know, Mr. Pons."

"Did you receive the post this morning?"

"No, sir. Mr. Thornhill did."

Pons took another turn around the room, while Constable Lambert watched curiously.

"What do you make of it, Lambert?" he asked, as he came back to stand before the Constable.

"Mr. Pons, it looks as if somebody made Mr. Thornhill a present of these binoculars. They were intended to kill him, and when he took a glance through them, he was killed as he tried to focus them. They could have been sent or brought by anyone."

"Do you think so?" asked Pons dryly. "Surely only a man with some skill in mechanics could have devised this fatal instrument."

"He could have been hired to do so," said the Constable.

"Capital!" cried Pons. "Just so." He turned abruptly again to Hawgood. "Let us return for a moment to the cry you fancied you heard. Did you respond to it?"

"No, Mr. Pons. It was too indefinite. It might have been a dog somewhere."

"I see. So that some time elapsed before you found Mr. Thornhill?"

"Yes, sir. I'd guess it was half an hour after he might have cried out. I was at work belowstairs."

Pons regarded him thoughtfully for a moment before he spoke again. "In that case, Hawgood, you must have heard him fall."

"Sir," said Hawgood stiffly, "I was in the left wing. The Squire was in the right. If I had heard anything I'd lay it to his stomping around or turning something over—he'd do that if he were upset or angry."

"You are not only then the Squire's butler?"

"No, sir. I do whatever's needing to be done. I was just at the foot of the stairs when I heard the postman's ring this morning. I

heard the Squire stomping around to get the post. Then I went on into the left wing belowstairs and didn't hear much of anything else. I suppose the Squire went back to the study to open the letters, as he usually did. I knew his habits. I've been his man ever since the war."

"You were his batman in service?"

"Yes, sir."

"And general factotum ever since?"

"Yes, sir."

"Were you fond of him, Hawgood?"

"Sir, I was used to him," answered Hawgood stiffly.

"Mr Thornhill was always kind and considerate?"

"I would not say so."

"Oh. What would you say, Hawgood?"

"The Squire was a rough man. He had certain principles and he lived up to them. Rough as he was, he meant well."

"Autocratic, would you say, Hawgood?"

"Quite, sir."

"Accustomed to obedience, and outraged at any defection. Self-righteous. Perhaps a martinet?"

"I suppose he was all that, sir," said Hawgood cautiously.

At that point, Dr. Scarr interposed. "If you'll forgive me, gentlemen—are you finished here? Mr. Thornhill's body should be removed."

"By all means, Doctor," said Constable Lambert. "Will you attend to it? In the meantime, I'd like a word with Miss Thornhill if you'll lead the way, Hawgood."

Dr. Scarr left the room, followed by Hawgood and Constable Lambert.

Pons flashed me a quick, quizzical look. "A morbid little puzzle, eh, Parker?"

"Horrible," I said.

"I noticed your concentrated silence. What conclusions have you drawn?"

"Only that someone must have hated this man with singular passion," I said.

"You do not think it odd that this should be so?"

"I don't follow," I said.

"Forgive me. I failed to make myself clear. I submit that this is a curious method of seeking revenge on a man like the Squire. The Squire was given to abrupt, disagreeable reactions—the kind which

would inspire equally quick anger and, if vengeance at all, sudden violent action—a blow with a poker, seized on the place, a shot from a handy gun, or stabbing with a convenient weapon. Such premeditation as is implied in the use of this weapon indicates something more than sudden blind rage.”

“Perhaps that’s true for most occasions when the Squire had an outburst of rage,” I said. “But not all. Consider young Hawgood, for instance, who had six months in gaol to brood about his father’s employer.”

“Remote—but a possibility,” conceded Pons.

“Moreover,” I pressed my point with some assurance, “it took premeditation to work out such a diabolical plan for murder as this.”

Pons smiled. “I believe I made the same point for a different effect,” he said. “What we shall have to have, I fear, is some sort of record of the Squire’s outbursts.”

“Perhaps I can help you, Mr. Pons,” said a feminine voice from the threshold of the study.

“Miss Emily Thornhill,” said Constable Lambert at her heels.

The attractive young woman advancing toward us, her dark eyes flashing, continued, “I learned you were on the premises, Mr. Pons. I do not propose to be interrogated twice. Please come to the drawing-room, gentlemen.”

“As you wish, Miss Thornhill,” said Pons.

Our hostess led the way with an almost feline grace. She was striking too, in a curiously feline way—with high cheekbones, a narrow face, and a kind of petulant, sensuous mouth.

The drawing-room was in the wing opposite the study. Once there, Miss Thornhill asked us to be seated, making a sweeping motion with her right arm.

“Mr. Lambert, if you please,” she said.

“I wanted to ask whether you knew who might wish to see your father dead, Miss Thornhill.”

“At least a score of people—and I think I am being conservative.”

“Could you be specific?”

“Let me get my diary.”

She excused herself and went out.

“Miss Thornhill strikes me as considerably more her father’s daughter than she may think,” said Pons dryly.

Constable Lambert raised his eyebrows and nodded.

"Capable," Pons went on, "of anything the eternal feminine is capable of doing."

"You open up limitless possibilities, Mr. Pons," said the constable.

"I have somewhat more skill at this than at darts, Lambert."

We fell silent, and in a few moments Miss Thornhill returned, carrying a hasped, leatherbound book. Her manner was coldly business-like, as if she were determined to get this unpleasantness over with as soon as possible.

"Ever since my mother died, I have kept a record of Father's rages," she said with an almost chilling matter-of-factness. "Where would you like me to begin?"

The Constable glanced at Pons.

"A fortnight ago," said Pons.

She gave him a calculating glance, then opened her book.

"Twelfth," she said. "Nothing pertinent.

"Thirteenth. Father sacked Fred today—that's Fred Mason, who was our gardener. He would not give him a reference. Fred left in a towering fury.

"Fourteenth. Father struck John this morning. John Blakiston was Fred's assistant. John left.

"Fifteenth. Nothing.

"Sixteenth. Father quarreled with the postman."

"Mr. Quigg?" interrupted the Constable.

"Yes, Mr. Lambert. Father expected a letter he didn't receive in the post that morning. Characteristically, he blamed the postman for it. One word led to another. They all but came to blows."

"Go on, Miss Thornhill, please."

"Seventeenth. Father dressed down poor Keith today for presuming to have fallen in love with me. It was especially hard on him after what I had told him."

"What had you told your father?" asked Constable Lambert.

"Not Father—Keith Hallis. That was my fault, really. Keith is our farm manager, Mr. Pons. I suppose he thought himself in love with me—and perhaps I did encourage him a bit." She smiled. "I fear that's the nature of a woman. That morning Keith asked me to go to Doncaster with him. I always go, of course—but it was quite impossible to do as he asked. I'm afraid I found it necessary to be quite unforgivably brutal. It was afterward that Father had

words with him. He wanted to discharge him, but of course, that was absurd—he's our best man, so good with the horses, and such a handyman."

"I see. Please continue," said the Constable.

"Eighteenth. Father and Arthur Robson quarreled. Father knocked him down.

"Nineteenth. Nothing.

"Twentieth. Father humiliated Hawgood by taunting him about Alan. That's Hawgood's son. Father got him in gaol six months for stealing some trifle from the study."

"Did Hawgood ever protest this action?" interposed Pons.

"He pleaded with Father, of course—but I'm sure Hawgood knew it was of no use to do so. He offered to pay many times what the thing was worth, but Father said the law must take its course."

"What was the object stolen?" asked Pons.

"An inlaid dagger, Mr. Pons."

She went on. "Twenty-first. Nothing.

"Twenty-second. Father and I had words today. He referred to me with his usual endearments."

She paused, leafed over three pages, and finished with, "That seems to be all, gentlemen."

"If I may ask, Miss Thornhill—what were those 'usual little endearments'?"

"If you must know, Mr. Pons, my father was quite often in the habit of referring to me as 'My little bitch' or 'My damned slut'."

"Thank you."

"Is there anything more?"

"I think not," said Pons before the Constable could speak.

"Then—if you'll excuse me, I'll return to my room. Good-day, gentlemen."

We came to our feet and stood while she left the drawing-room. Then Constable Lambert turned to Pons.

"You'll want to speak to some of these men, I expect, Mr. Pons. Hallis and young Hawgood are in the grounds. We can begin with them."

"If you don't mind, Constable—I have a fancy to begin with Mr. Quigg. Do you know where we might find him at this hour?"

After he had recovered from his astonishment, Constable Lambert took out his watch and consulted it. "He should be in the vicinity of West End House," he said, "at the far end of Askrigg."

"Let us just see whether we can intercept him on his way back from there to the Post Office. I take it that is his course, Constable?"

"Yes, Mr. Pons."

"Let us not forget to impound those lethal binoculars," said Pons.

"I have no intention of forgetting them."

"And, before I forget, Constable," continued Pons, "you should have this. Its script may prove of singular importance."

He gave to Constable Lambert the little rectangle of linen paper he had picked up from the carpet in the study.

"Thank you, Mr. Pons."

Within a few minutes we left the house. Constable Lambert wheeled his bicycle for a way down the road in silence. But his curiosity finally got the better of him.

"If you don't mind my asking, Mr. Pons—despite my knowing something of your methods—why Mr. Quigg before anyone else?"

"Ah, that is elementary, Constable. I am looking for the most direct path to the identity of the murderer. Let us first then fix upon the source of the binoculars. Did they come by hand or by post? I should think it highly unlikely that they came by hand, in the circumstances. That leaves us the post."

"I see, Mr. Pons." But it was perfectly evident on Constable Lambert's honest features that he did not see any more than I.

We walked in silence, save for the cries of birds, the occasional barking of a dog from behind a hedge, and the rising sound of traffic from the street before us. Constable Lambert walked in manifest perplexity, and Pons went along, his grey eyes dancing, an annoyingly suggestive smile touching his thin lips, as if he cradled some knowledge which had escaped us.

We descended into the village, crossed the High Bridge over Askrigg Beck, passed the Crown Inn, Robinson's Gateways and the Post Office, and then, as we were approaching the Conservative Club, saw the postman bearing down upon us from the opposite direction.

"There's Quigg," said the Constable.

"Capital!" cried Pons, quickening his steps.

"Quigg!" called the Constable, and, having succeeded in getting his attention, he added, "We'd like a word with you."

The red-haired young man waited upon us.

"Mr. Quigg," said the Constable, as we came up, "this is Mr. Solar Pons. He'd like to know about that quarrel you had with the Squire."

Quigg's face coloured hotly. "Go and ask *him*" he said, in manifest irritation.

"Squire's dead," said the Constable bluntly.

"Dead!" cried the postman.

"Murdered," said the Constable.

"I'm not surprised," said Quigg tartly.

"Forgive me," said Pons. "Constable Lambert mistook my intention. I have no interest in any words you had with Mr. Thornhill."

"Yes, sir. What then?" Quigg waited.

"This morning you delivered at Thornhill Hall a package addressed to Miss Emily Thornhill, did you not?"

"Yes, Mr. Pons."

"Did you happen to notice where it was posted?"

"London, E. C. 4. Didn't see any return address."

"Thank you, Mr. Quigg. Be on your round."

"Miss Emily!" cried Constable Lambert, as the postman walked away.

"The binoculars were intended for her, Constable. Keith Hallis is your man. She struck his vanity a cruel blow. Her father, characteristically, accepted the package, tore it open, burned the wrappings, and was slain as he focused the glasses while taking a glance out of the windows.

"I thought it extremely unlikely that an anonymous gift would be sent to the Squire or any other man with a card inscribed in a masculine hand: *From an admirer*. You should have no difficulty gathering the evidence to convict Hallis turning up the manufacturer of the glasses, tracing Hallis's movements on his last visit to London, sampling his script. I commend the patient task to you."

For a long minute Constable Lambert goggled at Pons, but at last he said, "Mr. Pons, I don't know how to thank you."

"Say nothing, Constable. The deduction is easy, if logical. The task of assembling the evidence to convict is rather more difficult."

"I would never have thought of it, Mr. Pons!"

"Come, come it would inevitably have occurred to you, Lambert." Pons turned to me. "I think, Parker, we have ample time in which to complete our little jaunt."

The Adventure of the Orient Express

I.

THE CURIOUS matter of the memorable duplicity of Baron Egon Von Ruber must surely represent a high-water mark in the years of my association with Solar Pons, however little it redounds to my credit. It began for me in an unlikely place, far removed from our familiar quarters—Prague, in the summer of 1938, at the close of an international medical convention which I was privileged to attend as one of the British Medical Association's officially designated representatives. I had wired my wife the time of my leave-taking, for the Continent was in the throes of the New Germany's flexing of muscles under the guidance of a megalomaniac leader, and Pons must have learned from her that I planned to take the Orient Express late that day, for, only an hour before leaving, I received from Pons a long wire in our private code, which directed me to apply to a specified compartment and to share that compartment with Baron Egon Von Ruber; furthermore, I was to fall in with my traveling companion's every word and deed with implicit obedience. The implication of Pons's wire seemed perfectly clear to me—Von Ruber must certainly be in the service of His Majesty's Government and must be traveling to Paris on a mission of the first importance, one in which I was destined to play a part.

Yet I was hardly prepared for the fellow I found in my compartment when I presented myself a few minutes before departure time. He was a reasonably tall, thickset, broad-shouldered fellow with much tousled brown hair, a full beard and moustache of the same colour. Narrow-lidded eyes peered at me from behind pince-nez on a long black ribbon, and an unlit but partially consumed cigar was clamped between his teeth. He had set up a chessboard and was sitting before it, his slender fingers drumming impatiently on it, as if awaiting my arrival.

"Baron Von Ruber?" I asked. "I am Doctor Lyndon Parker."

"Typical British middle class," he said with rude bluntness. "Come in."

I pushed into the compartment and stowed my baggage away.

My traveling companion did not deign to glance at me again, but sat contemplating a problem on the board, his high brow wrinkled in concentration. I sat down opposite him, finally, at which he favoured me with a disapproving stare.

"Can you play chess?"

"Passably," I said, disdaining to tell him I had gained a provincial championship.

"Excellent!" he said. "Do you mind?"

Since his attitude clearly set forth his assumption that I would play, I agreed.

He immediately rearranged the pieces on the board, his long fingers moving with singular dexterity. I saw that he kept the black pieces before him, and allowed me the courtesy of the white, and obviously the opening move.

"Will you open, Doctor?"

I had not had the chance to study the problem he had had on the board, and I had thus no index to his ability. I tried to think of what Pons would do in such circumstances, and resolved to test the Baron's response to the King's Gambit. Accordingly, I advanced my pawn to King 4, which he countered with a similar move. I moved another pawn forward to King's Bishop 4, fully aware of the potential disadvantage of the move. The game proceeded slowly, and I waited to see whether the Baron would make a suicidal move of playing his pawn to King's Knight 4. It was soon evident, however, that Baron Von Ruber was too skilled a player to do so, and meant to refute my gambit with the Falkbeer Counter-Gambit.

"You are not a dilettante, Baron," I said.

"Obviously," he said. "I wish I could say as much for you, Doctor," he went on, with a wintry smile. "I was surprised at your opening. The King's Gambit is no longer often played; it is unsatisfactory on several counts."

His English was so flawless that I was persuaded to believe he had spent a long time in England.

"You have been in the diplomatic service, Baron?" I asked.

"You might say so," he replied.

"In England," I hazarded.

"I've spent considerable time in England, yes." He narrowed his eyes and added, "But now you are playing that guessing game your sleuthing friend is so fond of."

"Ah, you know Pons?"

"An amusing fellow with his devotion to ratiocination. But an amateur, Doctor, a rank amateur."

I was nettled, and it took a few moments to control my temper at this disparagement of Pons.

"Let us not forget our game, Doctor," the Baron said impatiently. "It is your move."

I swallowed my indignation, recalling Pons's coded instructions, and proceeded with the game. It was patent that I was pitted against an opponent of unusual skill, for, though I took longer and longer to make each move, I was clearly on the defensive in a considerably shorter time than I had anticipated, and Baron Von Ruber pressed his pursuit inexorably.

I did, however, make good use of my time—particularly during the Baron's own contemplative periods—in trying to draw upon everything I had learned about Pons's deductive science. Without being too open about it, I studied the Baron's every feature. His hands told me that he was not accustomed to manual labour, yet they were not as soft as a diplomat's might be; I deduced that he must then have certain hobbies which engaged his hands, and one of them, I was certain, on the basis of some slight discolorations of his skin, must be chemistry. His beard and moustache concealed most of his face, but there were telltale patches of iron grey hair at his temples, and a few fine crow's-feet radiating from his eyes, which forced me to conclude that he was certainly not under forty-five, and not over fifty-five, very probably close to fifty, however much older his hirsute adornment made him look. The very circumstances of our being together suggested beyond cavil that Baron Egon Von Ruber was certainly a British agent, a German national recruited by one of our men in British Intelligence.

There was no clue, however, as to what role he might at the moment be playing. I had already observed that he was not overburdened with baggage. A briefcase lay on the seat beside him; a single bag on the overhead rack, and a waterproof coat hung from a hanger just inside the door.

"You are bound for Paris, Baron?" I ventured abruptly, risking his displeasure.

"And you for London," he countered blandly. "How can you bear that foggy climate?—especially since you, as a medical man, must know how unhealthy it is." Before I could reply, he began to chuckle; his shoulders trembled with withheld hilarity. "My dear

good Doctor Parker, you are here on orders, and you are dying of curiosity. Forgive me: checkmate! You are trying to practise Mr. Solar Pons's childish game of ratiocination and floundering in these waters. Let me ease your mind. I am waiting upon microfilmed and detailed accounts of the German High Command's plan to invade Poland."

He said this in a scarcely audible whisper. Nevertheless, I was too shocked for the moment to speak, and I found the unusual benevolence of Baron Von Ruber's gaze suddenly and unaccountably sinister.

"Poland," I whispered at last. "Are you sure?"

"Quite sure," he said blandly. "We shall not talk of it. I should warn you, however, that there are counter-intelligence agents who are aware that these accounts exist - microfilms of documents, letters, orders being held in abeyance and you know the reputation of this train, Doctor. I sincerely trust you are not counting on a quite, peaceful journey to Paris. I assure you, anything may happen. Are you armed, sir?"

I shook my head.

He clucked sympathetically. "You seem a little pale, Doctor."

"It is just surprise," I managed to say.

I would have given anything for a few minutes with Pons at this point of our journey. We were at the moment drawing out of Pilsen, bound for Mariánské-Lázně less than an hour away, but we were still an interminable distance from Paris, to say nothing of London.

Baron Von Ruber sat back, the fingers of one hand still cradling a rook. "Have you traveled often by the Orient Express, Doctor?"

"I cannot say so. Once to Istanbul, twice to Prague - this being the second time - and once to Vienna."

"Georges Nagelmackers could hardly have conceived that his grandiose dream of duplicating the American coast-to-coast Pullman service with the establishment of the *Compagnie Internationale des Wagons Lits* would have been so successful," mused Baron Von Ruber.

I had to confess that I did not know who Nagelmackers was.

"A Belgian engineer," the Baron said almost crossly. "At that, though he established the company in 1876, it took seven more years before the Orient Express made its first run by way of Vienna and Budapest. The date was June 5, 1883, though an all-sleeper train had established a run between Calais and Nice before that."

"Ah, the Blue Train," I said.

Von Ruber nodded. "Perhaps this train has the most cosmopolitan clientele in the world," he went on, "though, of course, it is at Vienna that the clientele becomes most varied."

He had said enough to convince me that he was a seasoned traveler; it followed therefore that he probably had more than ordinary linguistic ability.

"Yet the complexion of the clientele has altered over the years," he went on. "In the earlier decades one as frequently encountered Balkan rulers traveling incognito as valeted gentlemen, Indian maharajahs as Russian Grand Dukes, and there were certain moneyed travelers who brought their own furnishings to the cars." He smiled. "What fancies we human beings indulge! What vanities we foster!" He leaned forward once more. "There is nothing like chess to keep the mind in order, Doctor. Shall we have another game?"

I nodded. "Will you open?"

He shook his head gently. "You are my guest, Doctor. It is the guest's privilege to open." He might as well have put into words his clear inference that I needed the additional advantage of the opening.

Nettled again, I decided upon the difficult Reti's Opening, and advanced my knight to King's Bishop 3. I was gratified at the almost imperceptible raising of Baron Von Ruber's eyebrows.

But my gratification was brief. To tell the truth, the information Baron Von Ruber had offered was startling and dismaying, for implicit in it was the clear knowledge that a major war impended. He had said "waiting upon" so patently he did not yet have the microfilms; just as patently, he expected to receive them sometime in the course of our journey, very probably after we had crossed the border into Germany at Cheb, slightly over an hour away.

Yet I was dubious about even these seemingly elementary conclusions. Would Pons have reasoned in this fashion? The microfilms might even now be on the train, and whoever carried them might only be awaiting a suitable opportunity to transfer them to my companion. I wished more than ever that Pons were at hand to deal with this contingency, for Baron Von Ruber seemed to me far more interested in his chess game than in any impending event. I marveled at his detachment. If German counter-intelligence were aware of Baron Von Ruber's accommodations with His Majesty's Government, then almost certainly somewhere on this train lurked

agents who would watch his every move. Yet it occurred to me that had Von Ruber been under such surveillance, he would almost certainly not have been chosen to carry anything to Paris. It was rather more likely that some other British agent had been assigned to pass the microfilms to Von Ruber.

Outside, the villages and countryside of Czechoslovakia flashed by, the mundane occupations of villagers and countrymen were carried on as on another planet. But, of course, it was the Orient Express that was another planet, one that was in miniature the continent of Europe, bearing Russians, Chinese, Poles, Slovaks, Germans, Frenchmen, Americans, and my own countrymen in their pursuit of matters as prosaic as those of the tillers of the fields we passed, or as devious as that which now concerned Baron Egon Von Ruber and, at Pons's whim, myself, for it seemed all as plain as a pikestaff to me—Von Ruber had been chosen to carry the microfilms to Paris, and I to take them across the Channel.

The brown-uniformed chef du train tapped on the door and opened it, looking in. "Comfortable, gentlemen?"

Baron Von Ruber nodded brusquely, but I fear, in spite of my friendly assurance, I looked upon the man with reservations, for, in the circumstances everyone must inevitably seem to come under suspicion.

Baron Von Ruber, however, was engrossed. He had not been content to play my game, but had rapidly taken the offensive of his own, and was clearly bent upon making it his game, which, in my state of mind, I saw little opportunity of preventing, since he maintained an aggressive attitude that brooked little countering. In his precision, he was not above a waspish aside from time to time.

"Tut, tut, Doctor," he said on one occasion, "I fear your mind wanders. You sacrifice your pieces needlessly. You offer me little challenge."

Thus stung, I rose to his taunt, but he maintained his advantage. I fought stubbornly, and for a time even forgot the reason for our enforced companionship. Mariánské-Lázně was reached and passed, and it was not until we drew into Cheb and the train began to fill with swastika-banded guards and border personnel that my concern with Baron Von Ruber's mission resumed its paramount place.

The German Border officials seemed unnecessarily rough and blunt, but I had my passport and customs declaration in order, and

my baggage was so slight that it did not take them long to go through it; moreover, Baron Von Ruber's arrogant superiority made its impression on them, and we were soon abandoned.

"One must know how to treat these robots," said Von Ruber philosophically. "The German mind is peculiarly susceptible to domination. It bends to positive leadership - however in error it may be - as some flowers to the sun; the step from Bismarck to Hitler is not really such a long one as you British sometimes imagine, and it is always a profound riddle to the German mind how you people manage to fumble through without any significant evidence of political acumen."

I bridled, but bit back the angry words that rose, remembering Pons's admonition.

"Your move, Doctor," said Von Ruber, as placidly as if nothing he could say could ruffle my calm.

I brought my mind back to the game and sat pondering the board. The Baron now had me very much on the defensive, but I observed that, in contrast to his impatiently drumming fingers when I had made my entrance into our compartment, he was now almost icily detached - but alert with the alertness of one who is aware on more than one plane; only part of his attention was now given to the game; it was manifest that he sat with every sense aware, assimilating every untoward sound and interpreting it. The Orient Express was moving through Germany toward Nuremberg, but daylight still held to the countryside, though the first dusk could be seen from time to time in wooded areas and valleys from which the last light of the sun had been withdrawn.

"Ought we not to lock the door of our compartment, Baron?" I asked abruptly.

"I'm expecting visitors, Doctor," he answered, almost harshly. "I cannot say in advance in how much haste they may be."

I moved a pawn and lost it at once to my opponent, who sat looking at me, I thought, with a bored and tolerant air, as if he were now cognizant of some residual resentment in me, as I was aware of his low opinion of the British Intelligence in sending into this breach such an amateur as I. Thereafter, in rapid succession, I lost three more pieces and the game.

"Another game, Doctor?" Baron Von Ruber asked almost contemptuously.

"If you will open," I said, congratulating myself on not having

revealed to him my championship, which seemed now indeed far more insignificant than I had ever conceived it to be previously, for Baron Von Ruber was unmistakably a skilled opponent a cut or two above my level, though I assuaged the thought with the assurance that the tension of the circumstances inevitably altered my game.

He chose the English Opening; I countered, and we were off once more, though I had little taste for yet another game. Darkness was now creeping swiftly across the land; the German villages loomed out of the dusk all lit like clusters of glowworms, shining briefly in the course of our passage.

The game made progress, less swiftly than the Orient Express. This time, much to my astonishment, I gained a tentative, then a firm advantage. I noticed that Baron Von Ruber's slender fingers seemed to grip his pieces more tightly, and understood that, as the night wore on, he waited upon events with ever growing expectation, which must inevitably affect his game, even as my initial shock had affected mine. I pressed my advantage, reflecting that, after all, my responsibilities at the moment and until the microfilms were given to me were wholly passive.

At ten o'clock, and in full darkness, the Orient Express drew into Nuremberg. I looked out to the platform; it was reasonably well filled with travelers. I tried to pick out from among them someone who might attempt to reach my companion—the tall, aging Englishman, perhaps; the squat Frenchman; the bemonocled Austrian—who might all have been German citizens presenting themselves in these guises to my imagination. I smiled and turned away.

Baron Von Ruber was grim. "Something amuses you, Doctor?"

"Only fancies," I said.

"Of life or death?"

"I am familiar enough with both," I answered tartly. "You forget that I am a medical man."

"Ah, yes. We may need your services."

I was sobered at once.

After an interminable wait, the Orient Express drew out of the station, rapidly gathering steam, and once more there was a considerable movement up and down the corridor, as there was after every stop. But presently this died away, and the train sped across country toward Vienna on its absurdly winding course to Paris.

We resumed our game, myself intent now, the Baron far more concerned about matters external to the board. Perhaps, inevitably in these circumstances, I was finally able to checkmate him.

"You improve, Doctor," he said laconically.

In an imprudent outburst of self-satisfaction, I said, I hope modestly, "I once took a provincial championship."

"Indeed," he said correctly. "My congratulations." His whole tone implied that he somehow believed that British standards of judgment in chess were somehow less precise and demanding than those maintained on the Continent.

"Another game, Baron?" I asked.

"As you like."

"Please open," I said.

He did so. The Ruy Lopez.

"It is an opening I fancy," he said mildly.

"I have played and countered it," I said.

Precisely at this point, there was a sudden rush of footfalls in the corridor, then a faltering – and someone fell against the door of our compartment. Baron Von Ruber was out of his seat in a bound and at the door. He flung it open.

A slender Englishman, medium in build, toppled into our compartment, gasping, I thought, "Von-s Von-s," and clawing and reaching for Von Ruber's hands. My companion kicked the door shut and strove in vain to support our visitor, who was beyond supporting, for he collapsed and slid down along Von Ruber's body with a strangled moan to the floor, knocking over our chessboard and scattering the pieces.

"Doctor, your good offices, if you please," said Von Ruber, as he bent over the fallen man, methodically going through his pockets.

I dropped to my knees beside our visitor, but it needed only a few moments to assure me that he was beyond any help I could give him.

"Baron, this man is dead."

"I feared as much," said my companion calmly. "It complicates our position, I'm afraid."

I came to my feet and turned toward the door. "I'll call the chef du train."

"Stand where you are, Doctor!" commanded the Baron with surprising firmness.

I stood.

"Madman!" my companion went on. "Surely you understand that he is the last person to call! We must fall back upon our own ingenuity. We must dispose of the body."

Silently, he indicated the window. Then he turned off the lights, plunging our compartment into darkness.

"Where are we?" he asked.

I looked from the train, my senses reeling. Pons's "obey him implicitly" rang in my ears as if he had spoken it; indeed, I seemed to hear the echo of Pons's voice even as I thought of him.

"Passing through a forest, as nearly as I can make out," I said.

"Good! Lower the window, Doctor."

I did as he had bidden me.

"Now, then, give me a hand."

Distasteful as the task was, I bent to it, there was no alternative. The body was comparatively slight, however, and between us we managed with but little difficulty to push it out of the window.

Baron Von Ruber turned on the lights once more. Swiftly, he set up the chessboard again, and with what, in the circumstances, was a phenomenal memory, he replaced every piece precisely as it had been. He scrutinized the compartment carefully for any sign of blood, I concluded—and then sat down once again, as composed as if he had but risen to stretch his legs.

"You are pale, Doctor," he said ironically.

"I'm unaccustomed to dealing with bodies in this cavalier fashion."

"Ah, one adjusts to circumstances," he said, shrugging. "A body in our compartment would only draw attention to us. We cannot afford it. The German Gestapo, of whom you may have heard, are anything but gentle in their methods. But perhaps an English gentleman would not appreciate a course so alien to the methods of your Scotland Yard."

"How did he die?" I asked.

He smiled. "Surely you should tell me that? He was poisoned, I think. There is no sign of blood here, and I saw none. Did you?"

I shook my head. "Did you know him, Baron?"

"Alas, yes! He was a British agent named Ashenten. He was really too old for service. But he accomplished many things during and after the last war, especially in the course of the Russian revolution—and you British are sadly sentimental about your old boys. I salute him, no less; there was bark in him still. I suspect somewhere there is a woman—he was susceptible to them. It would be easy to slip something into a drink for him if he trusted her."

"I should have thought a seasoned British agent would be alert to every such device," I said.

"Ah, there is always a conflict in Englishmen between caution and chivalry," said Baron Von Ruber with a little smile. He shrugged. "I believe it is your move, Doctor."

I shook my head. "How can you so cold-bloodedly go on with a game of chess at a time like this?"

"Doctor, you of all people should know that life goes on no matter how often death intervenes. I regret Ashenten's death, but then, he was unmarried, he leaves no family, his place will be filled. Very probably old Colonel Somerset, who trained him, has his substitute ready to step into his place. Pray move, Doctor. I fear we may not have much longer to finish our game."

I bent to the board once again, while my companion rose, crossed to the door of our compartment, and looked out. He took the cigar out of his mouth, cradled it for a while in his fingers, and then dropped it into the receptacle for waste beside his seat.

"I'm sorry," I said. "I find it impossible to concentrate."

"Very well," said my companion. "Let us just put out the light and rest for a while in the dark. I should not be surprised at some further interruption soon, if—as I suspect—Ashenten was followed to our compartment."

He suited his actions to his words, and our compartment was darkened once more.

I welcomed the dark. I sought to bring order into my confused thoughts. I was still unsettled about Von Ruber's callousness in disposing of Ashenten's body, and a score of questions pressed upon me. How long would it take for the body to be discovered? Perhaps not until morning. But even at that hour the Orient Express would still be in Germany, it could be halted, searched, and everyone aboard subjected to the ungentle interrogation of the Gestapo. Yet, clearly, there was nothing to connect us with Ashenten, on the contrary, if Von Ruber were under suspicion of acting clandestinely for Britain, he would be the last person to be suspected of having a hand in Ashenten's death. It followed, inevitably, that the body of a dead British agent would quite properly be laid to German counter-intelligence, and nothing whatever would be done about it.

I remained disquieted. I was at a loss to understand why Pons had chosen to plunge me into such a network of intrigue, and I knew that at this point the untoward events about which Baron Von Ruber had warned me had only just begun. We were now moving toward the former Austrian border, which, since *Anschluss* only a

few months before, was no more; we would thus be on German territory for many more hours.

"Ought we not to make up our berths?" I asked.

"To sleep?" asked Von Ruber incredulously. "My dear Doctor Parker, it would surely be a convenience for our unknown 'friends' if we were to sleep. One of us, at least, must remain constantly vigilant. I prefer it to be both. If you must sleep, let it be by day, when we are less likely to be called upon to act."

"Forgive me," I said. "I am not accustomed to these intrigues."

Baron Von Ruber barked his brief laughter. "Give you a corpse in familiar British surroundings, eh, Doctor? And with your ratiocinative friend standing by to solve the little riddle. You ought to be familiar with Dr. Freud, sir. It has perhaps not occurred to you that your sleuthing friend may represent for you - ah, let us say - a father image?"

Whether it was my traveling companion's casually scornful air, or whether he touched upon a raw nerve, I could not say; but his retort stirred me immediately to cold fury; I did not trust myself to speak, and I had to resist the impulse to get up and leave the compartment. Admittedly, part of that fury was directed against Pons for subjecting me to Von Ruber's companionship; but he could certainly not have known of the fellow's unmitigated arrogance, and surely not of the low opinion Baron Von Ruber held of him! I simmered, a condition which Von Ruber's quiet chuckling did not abate.

I sat in smouldering silence for miles, staring out of the window. As nearly as I could determine, the Orient Express was still passing between the Bohemian forest and the valley of the Danube. The lights of villages seemed now not so many, testifying to the deepening night, and the stations through which the train passed without stopping were largely deserted. To add to my gradually subsiding irritation, I was hungry.

Yet I must have dozed off, for I was awakened suddenly by Baron Von Ruber's hand gripping my shoulder and his sibilant voice at my ear. What I would not have given at that moment to hear Pons's familiar, "The game's afoot!" Instead I heard my traveling companion whisper, "Wake up, Doctor. We are about to have company."

I snapped into complete awareness at once.

Baron Von Ruber returned to his seat just as the door of our compartment opened noiselessly and a slight figure slipped inside.

Baron Von Ruber turned on the light.

There stood an attractive, slender woman who looked hardly more than a girl, her eyes wide in the light, her lips parted. She carried one clenched fist to her mouth, and crouched back against the door, like a beautiful creature at bay.

"To what do we owe the honour of this visit, Fräulein?" asked the Baron.

"Please help me," she whispered.

"Ah, and how can we do that?" asked my traveling companion without stirring from his seat.

"They are after me," she almost whimpered.

"The Fräulein must not expect us to understand her meaning without explanation," said Von Ruber.

"The Gestapo," she said, and shuddered.

I began to smoulder anew at my companion's utter lack of chivalry or even ordinary courtesy; he did not so much as offer her a seat; he seemed indifferent to her plight. But if I was indignant at his passivity, I was stunned by what followed.

For our visitor began to sway, and it seemed clear to me that she was about to faint. I leaped to my feet to go to her assistance — and almost simultaneously the compartment erupted into activity. Von Ruber sprang to his feet, shouting —

"Her nails, Parker. Beware of her nails!"

And then I can hardly bring myself to set it down even now — there was a muffled explosion from one side, and to my horror I saw a spot appear on that fair forehead as our visitor collapsed to the floor.

I flashed a glance at Von Ruber just as he restored a snub-nosed weapon fitted with a silencer to his pocket.

"You shot her!" I muttered in a strangled voice, my senses reeling.

"You bungler!" said Von Ruber in a voice that trembled with restrained anger. "You left me no other choice. Permit me to introduce you to Gisela Margenstein, known to everyone in British Intelligence as *die kleine Lorelei*, a notorious secret agent affiliated with the Gestapo. One of her favourite weapons was poison under her fingernails — one scratch, and death. Your country lost Cyril Woodbridge, one of the best men in British Intelligence, only two months ago in his hotel room in München — he died of a scratch on his neck. The last person known to have seen him alive was *die kleine Lorelei*. I have no doubt she pretended to faint, just as she

was doing here; he leaped to her assistance and was killed for his pains. Only a month before that, it was Raoul Gerson, French Intelligence. That infernal British chivalry almost cost you your life, Doctor."

I sat down, still too shaken to stand.

My companion was now unceremoniously searching the body of the woman he had shot down in cold blood.

I found my voice. "Sir, you are a murderer!"

"True, true," he said with equanimity, never even looking up. "Say rather an executioner, for Fräulein Margenstein was known to be implicated directly or indirectly in no less than twenty-seven deaths. Now, come, Doctor," he continued as he stood up and put out the lights once more, "we shall need to dispose of her body."

"No, sir," I cried.

"Doctor, open the window," commanded Baron Von Ruber in a voice of steel.

"I am paralyzed with shock," I answered.

"As you will, Doctor," said my companion. "The alternative, however, is so singularly unpleasant that you cannot have contemplated it. In a matter of hours the body will be discovered in our compartment. Can you imagine the reaction of the Gestapo to the death of one of their most valued agents? You will never see England again, Doctor Parker, or that fellow Pons to whose little adventures you are so devoted."

I knew that, if indeed the woman he had so mercilessly slain were, as he said, *die kleine Lorelei*, what he now said was only too true. I forced myself to open the window, and, though almost nauseated with shock and revulsion, I compelled myself next to help Von Ruber dispose of the body. Then I sank down heavily in my seat.

"Who would have thought a medical man to be so shaken," said Baron Von Ruber softly out of the darkness. "Or so soft."

"I have for many of my adult years sat in, as it were, at the solving of murders," I said passionately. "I never thought I should witness so cold-blooded a crime."

"Accessory to the fact, is, I believe, the term," said Von Ruber. "But were you not in the war?"

"I was."

"And did you not witness many deaths fully as violent if not more so?"

"Indeed, I did."

"One of your friends was torn apart by a shell not very far from you on one occasion," he continued.

"How could you possibly know that?" I cried.

"My dear Doctor, it is not only private inquiry agents who may be able to learn things, either by field work or the deductive process. In this service we never employ anyone, no matter how casually, without learning everything about him there is to be learned. Shall I tell you the antecedents of your wife, the former Constance Dorrington, the details of your private practise, or the continued bondage you have to those long familiar quarters at number 7B, Praed Street? Since 1919, I believe, Doctor."

"I understand that I have been thoroughly inquired into," I said bitterly.

"You have indeed," he replied. "And we know that you are a man in whom your government can place implicit trust."

"Thank you," I said. "I had not thought that complicity in murder—"

"Execution."

"—would be demanded of me."

"Any more than it was from 1914 to 1918?"

"Ah, that was different."

"Forgive me, Doctor—this is precisely the same. Your pathetic Mr. Chamberlain may plan to arrange for peace in our time, but make no mistake about it—we are at war, not overtly, as yet, but behind the facades. The microfilms should prove as much to His Majesty's government. Not—" he added wryly—"that I put much faith in either photographs or human intelligence. But it is of the first importance that the films reach their destination—and a life like that of *die kleine Lorelei* is completely inconsequential by comparison. Think on it, Doctor. I have work to do."

The lights went on again, and my companion got down on his knees to scrutinize the floor—in search of bloodstains, I concluded. But it was soon obvious in the satisfaction on his face that he had not found anything incriminating. He got up, dusted off his knees, and sniffed the air.

"A trace of the scent she wore is still here," he said then. "We shall keep the windows open in spite of the late summer coolness. Do you mind, Doctor?"

"As you like."

He put out the lights once more and took his seat again.

"I should think it reasonably safe to sleep a little, if you are so

mined, Doctor." Baron Von Ruber said presently. "I rather think we shall not be disturbed for a few hours. They will want to give Fräulein Margenstein all the time she may need."

"And when her body is discovered?" I asked.

"My dear fellow, in this profession lives are traded with less compunction than stocks on the Bourse. Tomorrow it may be mine. Who knows? We shall hope, with good fortune, to spare yours."

I closed my eyes against the fleeting landscape in its starlit darkness but closed them in vain against the scene I had witnessed only a short time ago, and which now rose up again in all its horror, so that I saw in my mind's eye still the momentary shock, the implicit recognition of death in that fair, seductive face, for the instant before *die kleine Lorelei* crumpled before me. Yet, despite the traumatic horror that lingered, the sounds of the Orient Express rushing blindly through the night eventually lulled me, and at last I slept.

II.

I woke later the following day than I had anticipated.

Across from me, Baron Egon Von Ruber was contemplating a partially smoked cigar, little more smoked down than that he had tossed into the ash-tray the previous evening. I glanced involuntarily into the waste receptacle: the cigar was gone. My companion had parsimoniously retrieved it. Even as I thought as much, he put the cigar back between his lips. At the same moment he saw that I was awake.

"You slept very well for having witnessed an execution," he said dryly. "But you must be hungry. A restaurant car was attached to the train in Vienna. Are you up to something to eat?"

I said that I was. "Where are we?"

"Just out of Vienna," he answered.

He waited while I performed my ablutions, busying himself with the arrangement of his briefcase on the seat of our compartment. Then we stepped out into the corridor.

"You haven't locked the door," I pointed out.

He shrugged with an expressionless face. "What good is a lock against someone determined to enter?" he asked.

The restaurant car was crowded. Nevertheless, Baron Von Ruber's natural self-importance impressed itself upon the head-waiter, who escorted us to a table and, with a flourish, laid menus

before us. The food was Viennese *Wienerschnitzeln*, *Zurebelrostbraten*, *Karfiol*, *Knödl*, *Apfelstrudel*, *sole Metternich*, *Ribisel* and the dining-car attendants were almost certainly Viennese. I had not eaten since just before boarding the train late the previous afternoon, and I was ravenous; perhaps against my better judgment, I ordered a lavish meal, beginning with strong, aromatic coffee and rolls and ending with a large piece of *Apfelstrudel*.

Baron Von Ruber eyed the menu more judiciously.

I looked around the car. A good third of its occupants were military personnel. Long association with Solar Pons, however, made it inevitable that I should scrutinize our fellow diners with more than ordinary care. The majority of them, apart from the military, were the customary travelers, but they were now a more cosmopolitan assemblage than I had observed either at Prague or at Nuremberg—a yashmaked Indian Maharanee and her attendant, a fez-wearing Egyptian, a burnoosed Arabian added colour to the clientele in the restaurant car, and various languages fell to ear. There were, however, certain occupants of the car who seemed to show as much interest in us as I did in them—a rotund little Frenchman with waxed moustaches, whose keen eyes dwelt upon us more than once; a chunky old man, whose eyes were masked by dark glasses, and whose mouth had a bulldog tenacity; and an almost flamboyantly handsome young man clad in a sports jacket, with a Byronesque scarf knotted about his neck, who, though he was playing the gallant with a young lady met on the train, was nevertheless fully as observant as I fancied myself to be.

I watched these three people casually. The Frenchman retreated behind a newspaper; the young fellow continued to dance attendance upon his new-found friend; the old man got up and, with the aid of a cane upon which he leaned heavily, for he had, I saw now, a clubfoot, lumbered out of the car. And across from me, Baron Von Ruber finally made up his mind about what he wanted to eat and ordered coffee, rolls, and *sole Metternich*.

"You eat sparingly," I said.

"The better to keep my wits about me, Doctor," he replied. "I could not help noticing that you were examining our fellow diners. You are sadly obvious about it."

I felt a flush rising to my cheeks.

"The successful way in which to accomplish your end is to appear to be casual. Observe that young fellow in the sports jacket, for

example. I would not be surprised to learn that he has discovered more essential information about everyone in the car than anyone else in it, and yet he has seemed completely won by the young lady."

"I have to point out that I was aware of his scrutiny," I said stiffly.

"And the military?"

I said I had not thought them of any interest.

"Yet two of them — plainly members of the Gestapo — have hardly taken their eyes off us," said Von Ruber calmly.

At this moment, the young man in the sports jacket ushered his companion out of her seat and came down the car toward us. As they passed, a tiny ball of paper dropped gently to the table in front of me.

"Ah, Doctor," said Von Ruber softly, "you have made a friend."

I covered the ball of paper with my hand, palmed it, and unfolded it under the table. I glanced down and read:

"Take care. You are being watched by the *Polizei*. If you need help, call for —"

The message ended in a scrawled representation of an insouciant human figure, its head surmounted by a halo.

I passed it across the table to my companion. "Perhaps you know that signature, Baron?"

"I take it for the representation of some sort of saint," said my traveling companion. "And how many saints are there in 1938? Not many. This one bears a worldly look. So we may take it he is earthbound."

"In short, an adventurer."

He nodded. "Or an intriguer. He may be useful. On the other hand, he may be only another gambit ventured by the enemy."

I was about to speak, but the Baron stopped me with a quick warning, his face turned down and aside. "Be careful. Our lips are being read by a little corporal across the way."

I knew better than to turn my head away from my companion. What I said was innocuous. Baron Von Ruber did not speak again, for at the moment food was placed before us, and we were both impatient for it.

We lunched in silence, and when we had finished, made our way back to our compartment.

Baron Von Ruber opened the door and immediately threw up one hand in the German salute, saying, "Heil Hitler!"

Our compartment was occupied. The thick-shouldered old man I had seen in the restaurant car sat in Baron Von Ruber's place; a hard faced, muscular young man sat in mine. It was obvious that our baggage had been examined and the compartment itself subjected to the most minute search. The old man had an ugly-looking weapon in one hand; it was pointed at us. He carried his heavy cane in the other hand, and leaned upon it as he got to his feet. His clubfoot was of such dimensions that it seemed of itself to wear an air of menace. His voice, when he spoke, was guttural; his language was German, and he addressed himself to Von Ruber.

Their conversation was extraordinary, and for the first time I began to have grave doubts about Baron Egon Von Ruber's role. Was he indeed a British agent? Or was he a double agent? The two men talked as if they were old acquaintances, and as if I could not understand the German language.

"You dropped out of sight ten days ago in Prague," said the man with the clubfoot. "What happened?"

"The Herr Doktor should know I was ill at the home of a friend."

"Who?"

"Count Leventrov."

"We will see him. Your mission?"

"I could not accomplish it."

"Why not?"

"British agents prevented it."

"You are traveling with the friend of a notorious British detective."

"A coincidence. He was attending the medical convention in Prague."

The man with the clubfoot favoured Von Ruber with frowning, out-thrust lips and an expression of unusual doggedness, sinister to look upon. "Hans!" he said. His companion jumped to attention. "Search them."

Hans immediately subjected Von Ruber to a thorough search. I could not witness it completely, for the man with the clubfoot now stood between us, but I did see Hans yank Von Ruber's cigar roughly from his mouth, pry open his mouth to look and feel around in it, then push the cigar back into my companion's face again.

All too soon it was my turn, even to the removal of my shoes.

Hans found nothing. He stood back and shook his head mutely.

"Where is it?" barked the man with the clubfoot.

"I don't know what *it* is, Herr Doktor, but it would be my guess that *die kleine Lorelei* has it. She will have taken it from Ashenten."

"And Ashenten?"

"Dead."

"You saw him?"

Von Ruber nodded.

"Then it was you who pushed his body off the train."

"Manifestly. I could hardly afford to be found with it. He died in this compartment after he fell against the door in the corridor."

The face of the man with the clubfoot grew dark with anger. He prodded Von Ruber with his cane.

"The word?"

"Poland."

He snorted, but evidently Von Ruber had given the correct password or key, and the man with the clubfoot was satisfied. He motioned to Hans; Hans moved to the door. The man with the clubfoot made his shuffling, limping way after him. Hans edged out of the compartment.

The man with the clubfoot, looking now hugely sinister where he hulked against the partly open door, bowed in my direction and said, "Your pardon, gentlemen I am in the wrong compartment."

Then he was gone.

"Wrong compartment!" said Von Ruber sardonically. "That fellow is even in the wrong train. And, if it comes to that, the wrong war."

"Who is he?" I asked.

"An anachronism. He was of service to the German High Command a quarter of a century ago. The Germans are idealists who hope to keep past glories alive. But make no mistake about it that fellow with the clubfoot is still one of the most dangerous men in Europe."

"He is in Counter-Intelligence?"

"He lives for espionage," said Von Ruber. "I trust, Doctor, you did not receive the wrong impression from our conversation. I am quite well aware, of course, that you can speak and understand German."

"I thought it strange that you should know the password or whatever it is."

"It is my business to know it," said Von Ruber curtly. "My life would not be worth a pfennig if I didn't."

Nevertheless, I was far from reassured. Von Ruber was altogether too glib, and the incontrovertible evidence of his previous acquaintance with the man with the clubfoot, described by my companion as one of the most dangerous men in Europe, suggested several possibilities, most of them unpleasant. I tried hard to think of how Pons's mind would work, how he would study the facts now before me, and to what conclusions he would come. But my natural conclusions were circumvented by the undeniable fact that Pons himself had instructed me to place implicit confidence in Von Ruber, and there had been that in Pons's wire that hinted at some contradictory and unaccountable behaviour on the part of my traveling companion. Without that wire to fall back upon, I would unhesitatingly have concluded that Baron Egon Von Ruber was a double agent.

Even so, I was not entirely convinced that Von Ruber was honestly acting in the interests of His Majesty's Government. The object of the search instituted by the man with the clubfoot—as by *die kleine Lorelei*—must certainly be the microfilms to which Von Ruber had made such blunt reference the previous evening. Since there could be no doubt of the affiliation of these two agents, it followed that the microfilms had been lost; yet, Ashenten may have had them, and he must then have found some way in which to pass them on to someone else. To whom then? Could it be Von Ruber? I would have sworn that it could not; yet I was obliged to admit that in the excitement of Ashenten's entry into and death in our compartment, it was possible that the microfilms had passed from him to Von Ruber. But the search of Von Ruber and of our compartment was of such thoroughness that there seemed little possibility that the microfilms could be hidden either in the compartment or on Von Ruber's person.

"You are troubled, Doctor?" Von Ruber asked, not without a note of mockery.

"You must forgive me, Baron," I said. "I fear I have a pedestrian mind."

"Even a pedestrian mind ultimately arrives at its destination," replied Von Ruber.

He said nothing more, and there was a kind of embattled silence between us.

The train forged on. Salzburg came and went, and the Orient Express discharged and added passengers; München loomed two hours ahead. The woods, mountains, and tidy villages of Bavaria

rolled past; the landscape wore an appearance of serenity and peace, belied by the tensions of the surging events of history that went on behind that placid facade. It seemed to me that at any moment now some inquiry would be set on foot about the body of *die kleine Lorelei*, which must surely have been discovered by this time.

"What will happen when the body of the woman is found?" I asked.

"Ah, Doctor Parker, I should imagine that the authorities will conclude that someone on one of the trains passing over the route between Nuremberg and Vienna murdered her," he said. "If she was known to have been on board the Orient Express, then of course we will all be suspect. And, of course, it must have been known. They had no doubt that Ashenten was on this train, as the man with the clubfoot told us. They will conclude that *die kleine Lorelei* managed to kill Ashenten, and they will have some reason to believe that she, in turn, took the microfilms from him and was murdered for them.

"Now, then, Ashenten was known to have fallen into our compartment, but it is not known that he came there deliberately. He was a dying man; he could have fallen anywhere, could he not? The man with the clubfoot is certainly now a member of the Gestapo; he is convinced that I am still a German agent."

"Were you in fact ever such an agent, Baron?"

"Doctor Parker, the Barons Von Ruber have served the German Government faithfully up to the time it became evident that a monster—a madman ruled Germany!"

"Count Leventrov?"

"A friend. His house was a refuge. The British reached me there."

"So that, in point of time, you have only recently begun to act for my country against yours?" I pressed him.

"We have certain interests in common. And you must realize, Doctor, that my background is thoroughly known. My exploits, my accomplishments—all are in the files. I am known. The man with the clubfoot went through the business of searching me, but surely you understand that it is you who are suspect?"

"I!" I cried.

"Indeed, you. You are the friend of the notorious Mr. Solar Pons who is known to act for the government at such times as his lazy brother is not inclined to do so. I, Doctor Parker, am playing a role

of some consequence. I am your red herring. Thanks to the man with the clubfoot, they will think that I am watching you in all your pristine innocence."

"Incredible!"

"Has it never occurred to you that there is a very strong element of the incredible in all espionage? But I digress. You asked me what will happen. By the time that all the known facts about the matter have been assessed, the authorities will conclude that someone on this train is now in possession of the microfilms. He must be found, at all costs. We may thus expect some increased police activity—very probably from München to the border. But we are likely to escape it—we have been searched.

"The weapon!" I cried. "The gun with which you shot her."

"Did they find it?" he asked coolly.

"I didn't notice."

"Of course not. The gun went out the window within ten kilometres of the spot where they found *die kleine Lorelei*. Should they find it, they will discover the registration to be in a fictitious name—certainly not that of Von Ruber."

"Your fingerprints!"

"Oh, come, Doctor! I am hardly the amateur you must think me. There will be no fingerprints."

I was chagrined, all the more so because of the mockery that danced in my traveling companion's eyes. I fell silent and turned to watch the country pass. The train, which traveled at various speeds on its route, was now moving along at what I took to be top speed. We should soon, I reckoned, be in München, and I resolved to hold my tongue at least until then.

At München, in mid-evening, the Orient Express slowed for a long stop. The station platform, brilliantly lit, disclosed—as I had come to expect—a large number of military personnel, some standing in isolated groups, some mingling with other travelers, and several officers standing by themselves except for their orderlies.

"We are likely to be here for a while," said the Baron. "Perhaps you would care to join me in one of those little games your friend plays?"

"And that is?" I asked, I fear, somewhat coolly.

"Deduction, I believe he calls it." He pointed idly. "That fellow over there. What do you have to say of him?"

I looked out and saw a middle-aged, greying man, somewhat

gaunt of face, standing against a pillar. His orderly stood stiffly a little behind and to one side of him. Both seemed to be islands of solitude.

"An officer," I said.

"*Oberleutnant*, yes."

"Certainly not one of the recent bully boys. A Junker?"

"Very probably."

"He seems unhappy."

"Oh, they are all unhappy with Hitler, the Junkers. They helped create the monster under the delusion that they could control him." Von Ruber shrugged.

"Well, it is elementary that he is going on a journey, but not in our direction," I went on. "His orderly seems very young; so he is probably newly assigned, which leads me to suspect he is one of the National Socialist recruits placed to spy on the officer."

"Very good, Doctor! But there is something more."

"Oh, his uniform is spotless, and I have no doubt his manner punctilious—they pride themselves on that, do they not?"

"Go on."

"No more."

"Let me call your attention to his boots."

I looked long and hard at them. "I believe, Baron, that he has either a wooden foot or a wooden leg."

Baron Von Ruber clasped his hands together in pleasure. "You have learned well under your friend's guidance," he said. "Of course, there are a few trifling things you seem to have missed—he is a married man who has recently suffered a family death—observe the mourning band; he is arthritic—you will notice the slight thickening of the terminal joints of his little fingers; he is openly contemptuous of his orderly—he does not once look in his direction and even when his head turns toward him in the smallest measure, his expression betrays his feelings; his decorations indicate that he has been wounded in battle; so he is very probably a veteran of the World War. There are other small points, but they are of little consequence."

"Remarkable," I said, "but elementary."

Baron Von Ruber chuckled, and his eyes danced.

At this moment my gaze was arrested by a uniformed soldier striding by, a handsome young fellow who, as he passed, looked briefly into our compartment and favoured us with a friendly smile. With a start of surprise, I recognized him.

"Was that not our dashing young friend of the restaurant car?" I asked.

"Indeed it was."

"But where did he get that German uniform? I could have sworn he is English."

"I have no doubt he is. He appears to be a young man of considerable ingenuity. He has a bright future if he can manage to avoid getting shot."

The man with the clubfoot came limping by. He did not deign to glance in our direction. His companion, however, looked at us, one after the other, with brows beetling; his gaze was profoundly suspicious.

"That fellow Hans seems to be a primitive type," I said.

But Von Ruber was troubled. "Dear me," he murmured, "Hans has some doubts about us. I fear he may cause us trouble for which we may be unprepared."

"But he is simple-minded, compared to the other," I protested.

"My dear Doctor, it is precisely because that is true that he may be a source of trouble. It is always easier to bluff and parry an intelligent man, but all the finesse and cunning one may use are of no avail against the doubt and suspicion of a man of limited mental capacity such as Hans." He paused reflectively. "But how to act before Hans blunders into our little intrigue and destroys it — and us? I dislike to expose myself by leaving the compartment any more than necessary."

A tap on the door interrupted us.

"More trouble?" I whispered.

"Hardly the Gestapo. The tap is too gentle," answered Von Ruber. He raised his voice. "Come in."

The door opened and our insouciant young friend looked in. He was still clad in his German uniform.

"Come in," urged Von Ruber.

The young fellow slipped into the compartment.

"You suggested that you might be of service," said Von Ruber bluntly.

"I did."

"You saw the companion of the man with the clubfoot?"

"Called Hans."

"Yes. Can you devise some plan to separate him from the other long enough to keep him off the train until it has drawn out of the station?"

"That should be easy. He can be denounced as a spy—the Gestapo are sensitive about such matters. Let him have been observed slipping something to a French traveler, perhaps."

"Good! If you should be challenged, the password is 'Poland.'"

The young fellow smiled engagingly and went out.

"Was that not dangerous?" I asked, in astonishment.

"Certainly. But less so than permitting Hans his suspicions. We may have convinced the man with the clubfoot for a few hours, but with Hans nagging at him, we cannot say how long it will last. Hans is convinced we have the microfilms."

"He won't carry it off."

"I rather think he might," said Von Ruber confidently. "Consider both clubfoot and Hans were convinced we had the microfilms. Now, should your young friend denounce Hans in front of his employer, and accuse him of slipping something to a national of another, inimical country, the fellow with the clubfoot might well conclude that Hans may be playing a double agent's game. The conclusion may not last long—but it will last long enough to see us out of Germany. We need almost seven hours."

"And if it fails?"

Von Ruber shrugged. "I suspect our young friend can take care of himself. He has verve and daring. He is fluent in the language, for if he were not he would never chance wearing that uniform."

The activity of the station platform was continuing without cessation, and there was considerable movement in the corridor outside our compartment. Von Ruber was probably correct in his estimate of the situation, but I was far from happy. How had Pons ever come to cast me for a role in such a maelstrom of danger? Only desperation could have been at the bottom of it. At the same time, I was by no means free of my doubts about my traveling companion. The man with the clubfoot knew him as a German agent—and evidently one of long standing; yet Pons's wire had left me in no doubt that Von Ruber was acting for England. I had the uneasy feeling that a double agent could double again.

Moreover, a certain glibness of manner combined with little, almost unobtrusive mannerisms, convinced me that I had known Von Ruber at some previous time—probably as a moustached or clean-shaven man.

"Forgive me, Baron," I said presently, "you mentioned having been in the diplomatic service."

"Among other things."

"Could we by any chance have met before?"

"Quite possibly," said Von Ruber crisply.

"Can you recall the occasion?"

Von Ruber smiled thinly. "Do you remember the frequent engagements your detective friend had with Baron Ennesfred Kroll?"

"I do indeed. You were on his staff!" I hazarded.

"I was certainly on the scene, Doctor Parker, though I managed to keep just a step or two ahead of the law."

I suppose at that point I should have begun to suspect Baron Von Ruber's duplicity, but my companion wore such an air of assurance that I was nonplussed and when, a few moments later, he referred to an incident relative to one of Pons's encounters with Baron Kroll, which only someone associated with the matter could have known, my suspicions were once again put to rest. Yet I could not help harbouring, far back in my mind, the conviction that somewhere between München and Paris Baron Egon Von Ruber might quite possibly find it to his advantage to betray England as he was clearly now betraying his native country. I recalled Pons's frequent judgment on double agents that money could always buy them, and that not one was to be trusted. How had he come to trust Baron Von Ruber?

But essentially, I was troubled by the fact that if indeed I was intended to carry the microfilms of the German High Command's plans for the invasion of Poland to England, I still had not the slightest idea where they were, and if Baron Von Ruber had knowledge I lacked, he was being singularly uncommunicative. The man with the clubfoot was convinced that Ashenten had carried the microfilms; the woman known as *die kleine Lorelei* had been similarly convinced. But Ashenten had certainly not had them in his possession when we had disposed of his body. Where, then, were they? I could not help thinking that somehow Baron Von Ruber had come into possession of the microfilms and, for reasons of his own, had them in a place of concealment from which he did not intend to remove them.

He sat blandly across from me, the half-consumed cigar still clamped between his lips. Meeting my eyes, he spoke.

"I notice that the process of concentration seems to furrow your brow, Doctor."

I had not time to retort, for the train was now beginning to draw out of München, and the door of our compartment was suddenly thrust open. The man with the clubfoot stood there.

His eyes glowered at me, dangerously, I thought.

"What did Hans take from you?" he asked bluntly.

I shrugged. "You should ask him."

Baffled rage burned in his face. He shifted his gaze to my companion. "Von Ruber," he said in his guttural voice "*Heraus!*"

Baron Von Ruber rose with alacrity and followed the man with the clubfoot into the corridor.

Though I listened, it was manifestly impossible to hear clearly anything that went on in the corridor above the noise of the train moving through the night-held Bavarian countryside. Voices were raised, then lowered, raised again and finally I heard nothing more. Perhaps the two men had walked down the corridor. I was now more than ever convinced that Von Ruber was in possession of the microfilms; somehow he must have come by them from Ashenten; but where he had hidden them I could not begin to think though I suspected that he had cached them somewhere on the train away from the compartment and certainly not on his person, with the intention of picking them up just before leaving the train at the Gare de l'Est in Paris.

Von Ruber re-entered our compartment, a sphinx-like expression on his face. His eyes were shining. He sat down.

"That astonishing young fellow succeeded in implanting in the old man's mind enough suspicion of Hans to see us through Germany at least," he said.

"What happened?"

"Hans was arrested. He may very well lose his life before that fellow with the clubfoot concludes that he's been duped." He shrugged. "The fortunes of war. I had hoped both would be gone, but I am satisfied now that Hans is not on the train. I teared his suspicions."

"But we are not at war, Baron," I said coldly, shocked anew by his detachment about death.

"Not yet. But war is inevitable, Doctor Parker, in a year or two. That madman in Berlin will precipitate it. The British will concede regarding the Sudeten region, but the Polish invasion will be an act of war they will find intolerable since it disturbs the balance of power though the illusory hope of German neutralization of Russia may paralyze them for a time."

"The prospect of another war frightens me," I said.

"Does it not any intelligent man? Indeed, it does. But men are imperfect, and in the mass dangerous in their folly. We cannot stave it off." He shrugged "I think, Doctor, we can count on being undisturbed to the border. Perhaps we can sleep a little."

He reached up and put out the light.

III.

I awoke in the early hours of the morning to the touch of Von Ruber's hand on my shoulder.

"Doctor, we're coming to the border."

The Orient Express was already slowing down to draw into the station and in a few minutes came to a stop. French officials crowded aboard and came through the train. My passport was in order, and so was Von Ruber's, but I observed that though the customs officials ignored my baggage, the Baron's was carefully examined. Moreover, our compartment itself was closely scrutinized—the seats lifted and every possible place of concealment searched, by which I deduced that someone had sent word in advance to the effect that Von Ruber was to be kept under close observation.

I said as much to my companion when at last we were alone.

He only shrugged. "One's reputation frequently precedes one. It is always a question of knowing whether one must live up or down to it."

"I don't know about you, Baron," I said, "but I'm famished."

He rose with alacrity.

The activity of the border officials had crowded the restaurant car. I looked in vain for the man with the clubfoot, but I did not see him, though I caught a fleeting glimpse of our insouciant young friend, now back in his own clothing. The rotund little Frenchman with the pointed moustaches was very much present, and, it seemed to me, considerably interested in us, as before. He did us the courtesy of waiting until we had ordered before he came directly to our table.

"Your pardon, messieurs. I very much fear I must have a word with you."

With a flourish he held his credentials in his hand before us: M. Hercule Poirot of the French *Sûreté*.

"Sit down, M. Poirot."

"It will be less conspicuous so, *n'est-ce pas?*" He sat down next to me. "If I mistake not," he went on, addressing himself to my traveling companion, "you are the famous — or perhaps one should say, infamous — Baron Egon Von Ruber?"

Von Ruber bowed.

"Ah, *mon ami*, my little grey cells, they tell me you are not entering France for a holiday."

"I have heard of M. Poirot's little grey cells," said Von Ruber.

"Ah, so!" The little Frenchman permitted himself a chilly smile. "I have to say to you, M. le Baron, that your every move in France will be watched. We do not tolerate the espionage."

Von Ruber smiled. "Do you imagine, M. Poirot, that France has any secrets Germany does not already know, even to the complete plans of your Maginot Line? I am in France merely to escape Germany."

"We shall see," said M. Poirot. He rose, bowed, said, "I bid you good-morning, messieurs," and strode off, twirling his moustaches.

"We shall have, in effect, a guard to Paris," said Von Ruber, chuckling. "We could hardly have asked for more."

We ate leisurely, and presently returned to our compartment, aware of being observed by one of the guards and, in one place, by M. Poirot himself.

We had less than five hours to Paris, and I traveled now in growing perplexity. Baron Von Ruber, breakfast over, was again nursing his cigar; he did not seem at all communicative, though he glanced at me from time to time with what I could swear was an amused glint in his eyes, as if he were aware that I was concerned about the ambiguity of my position. I found it increasingly incomprehensible that Pons should have put me in so uncomfortable a situation without some good reason; I had supposed it was to carry the microfilms of the campaign against Poland to England, but Von Ruber had not said as much. He had said only that he had boarded the Orient Express and intended to receive the microfilms somewhere en route; perhaps I had made a gratuitous assumption. But if I had, why was I sharing the compartment with Von Ruber at Pons's urgent direction? I could only conclude that the Baron — if he were in possession of the microfilms, as I guessed — intended to wait until the very last moment, and hand them to me either as we approached Paris or in the Gare de l'Est itself, and I had no alternative but to wait upon his decision — which, after all, I had been instructed to do.

"Doctor Parker is unhappy, no?" asked Von Ruber abruptly.

"Say rather I am puzzled."

"But why?"

"I have thus far seen nothing of the materials of which you spoke."

"Were you intended to? That is, did your friend say to you that your mission included sight of the materials?"

I had to admit that my instructions had not been so explicit, and added, "But I could hardly imagine anyone who is in less need of a traveling companion than you — and I have been little more."

"It does not occur to you that it has been my pleasure to enjoy your company?"

"I fear I am too modest to entertain such a thought."

Baron Von Ruber shook his head deprecatingly. "I assure you, Doctor, you represent all that is best in the English gentleman, you have all his virtues, and in that alone you are stabilizing and reassuring."

I thanked him, but I was far from satisfied.

I said no more, but turned to the French countryside sweeping past, aglow in the light of the early morning sun, and so I sat through Nancy, and Châlons-sur-Marne, and at last the outskirts of Paris in late morning. Only then did I glance again in Baron Von Ruber's direction, and since he seemed to be asleep, I did not speak.

He came to life just as the Orient Express drew into the Gare de l'Est.

"My dear fellow," he said, "there is one last request I have to make of you. If you will follow me, please."

I gathered up my baggage, and followed him from the compartment and the train.

He walked directly over to a post on the station platform.

"So," he said. "Just here beside this post. Please take your stand here, Doctor Parker, and under no circumstances move until I return."

He half embraced me, clapped me on both arms, and patted my back. I thought for a moment that he intended to salute me in the Continental manner, but such was not his intention. Even at that moment, I had no intimation of his duplicity.

"Let me say, Doctor, I am indebted to Solar Pons for the pleasure of your company," he went on. "And now, if you will excuse me. . . ."

He turned and hurried away in the direction of the lavatories.

I looked quickly around. As I suspected, the rotund little Frenchman, M. Poirot of the *Sûreté*, was on Von Ruber's trail. But so was another gentleman I had not previously seen—a tall, broad-shouldered man carrying an overnight bag, who followed Von Ruber into the lavatory, while the little Frenchman took up his stand outside.

A latent indignation I had felt gave way to some anxiety. Lest it seem too conspicuous—though in the crowd of mixed nationals at the Gare de l'Est none could be less conspicuous in appearance than an English medical man en route to London—I did not keep my eyes riveted on the lavatories, but tried to appear nonchalant and above all, unconcerned and aloof from the crowd.

But when I turned again to look toward the toilets, I saw Von Ruber hastening away in another direction, Mr. Poirot hard at his heels, and, while I stood undecided about what to do, a hand gripped my upper arm, and an all-too-familiar voice whispered at my ear.

"Come, Parker. The game is afoot!"

I whirled, "Pons!" I cried.

"You have brought the materials?"

I began to apologize, but even as I spoke, Pons's hand dipped into the side pocket of my coat and came up with Von Ruber's unconsumed cigar!

"Von Ruber's cigar!" I cried.

"I fancy this is what we want," said Pons. "Come, now—there's a 'plane waiting to take us to Croydon."

Bancroft Pons waited in our quarters in Praed Street. His tall, imposing figure was striding back and forth across the room at our entrance, and had the appearance of having been so occupied for some time before our coming. He stopped in his tracks at our entrance.

"Ah, you have the films!" he cried at sight of Pons.

Pons crossed to the table, took Von Ruber's unconsumed cigar from his inner pocket and handed it gently to his brother.

"You will find the microfilms in a capsule embedded in this cigar, Bancroft. Treat it gently. It was almost crushed by the assistant of that fellow with the clubfoot."

Bancroft seized the cigar, muttering his gratitude, and hastened away at once.

"And how did you like Von Ruber?" asked Pons then.

"An unmitigated egotist," I said, "but otherwise pleasant enough. That fellow had the insolence to deride you!"

"Indeed?" asked Pons, raising his eyebrows.

"He called you a rank amateur," I said, my indignation rising again.

Pons's eyes danced. "I am hardly more," he said. "But you, I take it, emerged unscathed?"

"Apart from suffering his boorish rudeness," I said, "I have no wounds."

"In a few words, how did you estimate him?"

"To be frank, I was convinced he was a double agent. That fellow with the clubfoot knew him. The German woman he called *die kleine Lorelei* knew him. He had obviously been in the service of the German government. As a person he is one of the vainest men I have ever known."

"But cool and collected?"

"At all times," I shuddered. "He shot the woman point-blank."

"Undoubtedly to save your life."

"Well, yes," I conceded. "So he said. She carried poison under her nails." I paused, and my indignation chilled suddenly under a cloud of suspicion. "But how could you know that Hans almost crushed the microfilms when he pulled the cigar out of Von Ruber's mouth and pushed it back in again?" A few moments of revealing silence fell. "Pons!" I cried. "Pons, it was you! You were Baron Von Ruber!"

"I have seldom had more appreciation for a great impersonation, Parker. I thank you!" He executed an elaborate bow. "But come now—surely you suspected more than once?"

"I swear I did not. I thought I had met Von Ruber before. Certain mannerisms—but of course, they were yours!" I sank back into my chair in bewilderment. "But the man with the clubfoot! *Die kleine Lorelei*! Ashenten! They knew you as Von Ruber."

"Say, rather, they knew Von Ruber, but did not know Von Ruber was a double agent," said Pons. "The facts, my dear fellow, are elementary. Von Ruber was in the service of His Majesty's Government; he had long been in German Intelligence, but he had no stomach for Hitler and all that monster stands for; so he agreed to work for us. He obtained the microfilms and meant to carry them to Ashenten in Paris. Instead, he was taken seriously ill, and sought refuge with Count Leventrov, another of our agents. He

died in Leventrov's home. Leventrov then got the microfilms to Ashenten, who was being watched. So I was flown from London to assume Von Ruber's identity, which, since Von Ruber and I were not physically unlike, was not as difficult as you may imagine. I had, of course, a complete dossier on Von Ruber. Ashenten contrived to slip me the capsule even as he fell, dying, and I secreted it at once in the cigar. Since it was certain that *die kleine Lorelei* knew he had the capsule, she had to die. I have no regret about killing her; it was her life or yours, Parker, believe me. And I would far rather a dozen *Loreleis* died than one Parker!"

For that statement, delivered as it was with such warm and genuine sincerity, I forgave Pons for his extraordinary duplicity as Baron Egon Von Ruber, difficult as it was to do.

"Of course, it was prearranged that we would have someone at the Gare de l'Est to assume Von Ruber's identity long enough for me to join you for London - if only to lead astray any secret agent who might be following Von Ruber - little M. Poiret, for one." He sighed and cried, "If only there were some way to prevent the fulfillment of the German High Command's plans, but I fear there is none, there is no way short of assassination to stop the Nazi madman - and our Government, I fear, is too soft for that course. So we must prepare, Parker, for another and even more terrible holocaust. I regret that my poor powers are so limited."

Mr. Fairlie's Final Journey

I. THE LAST OF JONAS FAIRLIE

It was on a blustery night in September that my friend, Solar Pons, the private inquiry agent, was called into one of the most puzzling adventures of his career. He had completed the curious matter of the Cathedral Ghost but two days before, and had put away his notes and cuttings about it. The hour was late, and now he paced the floor, restless and preoccupied. Outside, a chill wind blew, making wintry sighs at the windows. Our good landlady, Mrs. Johnson, had built a cheery fire, and the flames danced high on the hearth, adding their voice to the wind's up the chimney.

I made some comment about Pons's restlessness, and he had just replied, "I am always restless when I have no problem before me," when the telephone rang.

"At this hour!" I cried. "Why, it is almost eleven."

"Time waits on no one," said Pons, and picked up the telephone with an eagerness he made no attempt to conceal. I heard him say only, "Pons here," and then no more, though I could hear distantly a rapid monologue at the other end of the line.

When at last, with a brief assurance that "we" would be ready, he put down the telephone, his eyes were alight. He stood rubbing his hands together, all his restlessness gone out of him before a rising anticipation, and faced me.

"Are you free for a little venture into Somerset?" he asked.

"Mrs. Bassett's baby isn't due for a month," I answered, "and Mrs. Parker won't be back from Australia short of a fortnight."

"Capital! Capital!" cried Pons. "A little problem has just come up at Frome."

"The last train from Paddington has gone."

"Too slow, in any event. The Chief Constable is on his way for us. That was he, telephoning en route."

"What is it?"

"We shall hear," said Pons. "Apparently it is murder. Just hand me that *ABC Railway Guide*, will you?"

I did as he asked, and watched him look up Frome.

"We can take quarters at the George, facing the market square, if it is necessary for us to stay. Frome still holds a cattle market — and, if I am not mistaken, an annual cheese show. It is a town where old customs prevail and thus one with character."

"I had better arrange for a *locum*, then," I said.

It was just past midnight when Sir Hugh Parrington, Chief Constable of Somerset, came for us. Within minutes we were on our way southwest of London, bound for Frome. Sir Hugh was a tall, lean man, florid of countenance, with a grey moustache and intense blue eyes under shaggy white brows. He began to talk from the moment we got into his Rolls-Royce.

"A senseless thing," he said. "Jonas Fairlie hadn't an enemy in the world. Got into the train for Paddington at 9:13 — the last train out of Frome — and turned up dead at the next station. Sitting there as if he slept. Might never have suspected anything but heart failure if it hadn't been for the smell of chloroform. Fairlie used to be Charlie Farway's adjutant. Charlie died two years ago, but Fairlie kept his old place at the manor along the Nunnery Road on the southwest edge of Frome. Kept to himself and made no trouble. Lady Farway wouldn't have him disturbed, but in any case there was some kind of arrangement with Charlie. He was sixty-two. He had something on his mind — no doubt of that. Funny thing. We searched him — we're holding the body and the carriage at Frome." He pawed at a pocket of his waistcoat and came out with a slip of paper. "Found this in the lining of his hat."

He switched on the interior light and handed the paper to Pons. I leaned over and read, in a thin, spidery script:

Solar Pons
7B Praed Street
W. 2—Ambassador 10,000

"You knew him?" asked Sir Hugh.

"No," answered Pons.

"You had some communication with him?"

"None."

"Did you know Charlie Farway?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"A queer business. Nothing else on Fairlie. All dressed up for his journey to London. His ticket was to Paddington — that's near you.

Pons. So he must have been coming to see you."

"That would seem to be the elementary deduction," said Pons dryly.

Sir Hugh grunted impatiently. "Fairlie came back from the war with Farway. Been with him ever since. Managed the estate and made some show in the business. The Farways have been in printing for some time—books for London publishers, that sort of thing. Fairlie kept his hand in, and I suppose he would have done so until he passed on. Normally, that is. She's fading away, they tell me. Never see her about any more. Confined to the house—in bed most of the time."

"Had Farway known Fairlie before the war?" asked Pons.

Sir Hugh looked at him in dim astonishment. "Would that matter? That's almost twenty years done, Pons."

"One never knows at this stage what matters and what doesn't," said Pons mildly. "The picture you've given me is of two strangers fallen together who come out of the war inseparable. Had Fairlie saved his life, perhaps?"

"If he had, you'd never have got it out of Fairlie. It was all he could do to give you the time of day."

"Uncommonly secretive?"

"Say he was 'quiet.' He went about like a shadow. He went off on journeys, but there wasn't much secret about most of them, for he had a daughter in Cheltenham and he went to visit her from time to time. She's been sent for."

"Farway's family?"

"Oh, you'll meet them, no doubt," said Sir Hugh. "No children though. They had a son, but he lost his life in a shooting accident seven years ago. After deer in Scotland."

Pons sat for a few moments in thoughtful silence before he spoke again. "Mr. Fairlie's journeys—I take it he went to places other than Cheltenham?"

"Twice to Scotland. Now and then to some cottage he owned on the coast of Wales. But it's his final journey we ought to be concerned about. Why was he coming to see you?"

"Granted that he was, we can only conclude that he had some reason imperative to himself, some troubling problem he wished to lay before someone. Other than that, we have no way of knowing at this point what it might be. But surely it is idle to speculate; we need to have certain facts before we can do so."

"If we can get them," said Sir Hugh with gruff scepticism.

The third-class carriage containing the body of the dead man had been shunted to a siding not far from the station at Frome. It stood under guard of four constables and Inspector Arthur Bates, a grim-faced C.I.D. officer, who led us to the small compartment and stood at the door, making a succinct report, while Pons began an examination of the carriage. Sir Hugh, too, remained outside. I joined him presently, so that Pons might have the carriage to himself while he heard the Inspector's account of how the dead man had been seen by a guard before the train had quite come into the next station, as a result of which the carriage had been detached there, and by order of the Chief Constable, brought back to Frome, since indications were that the death of Mr. Fairlie had taken place in Somerset rather than in Wiltshire.

The dead man himself might have been sleeping. He sat with his head back, his eyes closed, his mouth slightly open. The skin on the left cheek showed the kind of burn that might be expected from the pressure of a chloroform-saturated pad, which had evidently been carefully covered to prevent maximum burning; some similar discoloration was visible also about the dead man's nostrils.

"Mr. Aston, the guard," explained the Inspector, "said that as he had known Mr. Fairlie well, and that he had traveled many times in the same train with Mr. Fairlie, and that he had never known him to sleep on the train, he became suspicious when he saw him in this position, and thereupon entered the compartment to make sure he was all right. Mr. Fairlie was dead, and Mr. Aston smelled chloroform—though the window was open. There is still that smell about."

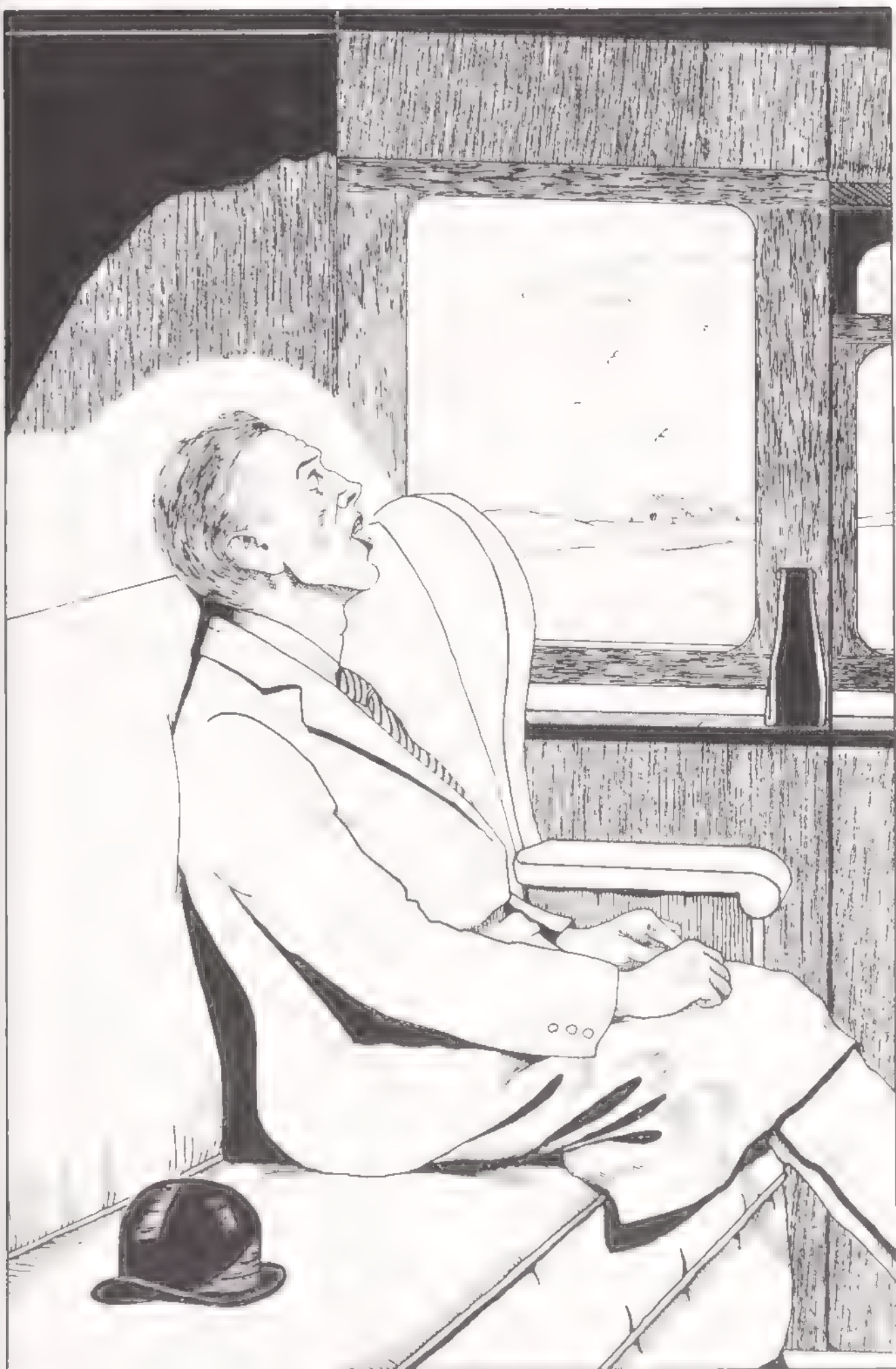
The dead man wore a look of austerity; his clothing was conservative, save for a small plaid waistcoat, across the front of which a thin gold watch chain could be seen; his bowler hat lay on the seat beside him; his luggage—a small overnight bag—stood under the seat. Mr. Fairlie was thin-faced, and his grey hair was cut close to his head. Even in death he looked very much like a civil servant.

Pons made a cursory examination of the body, paying closest attention to the dead man's hands; then he dropped to his knees to scrutinize the compartment itself.

"Nothing's been disturbed, Pons," boomed Sir Hugh.

"I assumed as much," answered Pons.

"Insofar as Mr. Fairlie's appearance indicates," the Inspector carried on, "he was evidently taken by surprise."



"And suddenly attacked," said Pons. "Let me call your attention to the middle fingernail of the right hand."

The Inspector worried forward like an aroused bulldog. He bent over the dead man.

"A touch of blood and what is certainly some skin, however small a fragment," said Pons. "He evidently had time to make some slight resistance. There is, too, a tuft of what appears to be hair in that hand and, if I may, I will just borrow that for a day or so."

"By all means," decided Sir Hugh before the Inspector could protest.

Pons pried it from the dead man's hand and placed it in one of the small envelopes he habitually carried for such purposes.

"There would also seem to be the suggestion that he was searched by someone other than the police," Pons went on. "There is a slight tear along the edge of the inner pocket of his coat, as if someone were in haste to see what he carried there."

"His spectacles in their case," said the Inspector.

"Mr. Fairlie's very appearance suggests that he would repair a tear before he wore the coat," said Pons.

"That he would," said Sir Hugh, crowding forward. "What did he have that someone else was looking for?"

"If we knew that, we might have the solution to his murder."

He got up off his knees. He looked out into the corridor, and back at the dead man. The yellow light of the carriage – the body of Jonas Fairlie – the voice of the wind and the dark night pressing in from all sides made for an eerie scene, one that held while Pons stood silently, his eyes dwelling on the dead man, his gaze thoughtful, one hand toying with the lobe of his left ear, and dissolved when he turned abruptly and stepped outside the carriage.

"Now then?" said Sir Hugh inquiringly, looking hopefully at Pons, as if he expected a miracle to be performed on the instant.

"Who knew he was coming to London?" asked Pons.

"We don't know. We've not questioned anyone at the house. We'll do that in the morning," said the Chief Constable.

"Of course, Mr. Pons, the booking-clerk knew," said Inspector Bates.

"Very probably not before he bought his ticket," said Pons. "Yet someone must have known he was going on a journey – or waited upon his doing so."

"Oh, Fairlie was always going on journeys," said Sir Hugh. "Fact. He went off on the average once a fortnight."

"Curious. Had he always done so?"

"Well, now," said Sir Hugh. "Well, now I can't say."

"Only in the last year or so, Mr. Pons," put in Inspector Bates. "He began to go off a little oftener when Mr. Farway died — once every six weeks, then — that was to see his daughter in Cheltenham. We've made inquiries at the booking-office. Then, after that, he must have grown more restless and perhaps more lonesome — and he went oftener."

"To Cheltenham?"

"No. To Scotland first. Then to Wales. Once to London. And then he increased his visits to his daughter."

"Did she not visit him here?"

Sir Hugh cut in. "There was some stiffness at the Hall, Pons. Farway wouldn't have it. He could be a hard man in some ways."

"Yet Fairlie and Farway were evidently inseparable, to judge by your account," said Pons.

"Well, there was some trouble about the girl," said Sir Hugh.

"Or Fairlie's wife?"

"I think not. They liked her. She was a town girl — Lucy Freeman. Died about ten years ago."

"They lived at the Hall?"

"On the grounds. There are tenant houses," explained Sir Hugh. "Diana was born there — his daughter. Grew up there. Since she left, Fairlie gave up the house. He now has quarters in the Hall." He shrugged impatiently. "But all this has nothing to do with the fact of Fairlie's murder."

"You must bear with me, Sir Hugh," said Pons imperturbably. "But I think we are done here. Let us repair to the George and resume in the morning."

"Very good. I'll come around then and take you over to the Hall — or wherever you want to go."

It was now dawn, but Pons showed no inclination to retire. Once in our quarters on the second floor of the George — a handsome, dignified hotel that faced the marketplace — he began to pace the floor restlessly, to and fro, out to the balcony overlooking the street, and back, his grey eyes keen, his mind evidently turning over what little we knew of the crime. I flung myself down on a bed and watched him go up and down, waiting upon him to speak of Mr Fairlie's death.

But he was not inclined to do so. He came back in from the

balcony at one point to say, "There are carts moving through the town. I should not be surprised if the Cheese Show is imminent. In any case, this must be market day, for the stalls are being got ready across the way. I am delighted at the maintenance of these old customs."

"I have heard you say so," I said. "But what do you make of the case?"

He paused in mid-stride, and gave me a reflective look. "I should not be surprised to learn that these waters are deeper than it would now appear."

"Why do you say so?"

"The little matter of Fairlie's journeys, for one thing," he said. "Does a man of his stamp chase off to Scotland and Wales because he is restless or lonesome? I doubt it."

"Oh, come, Pons, it is entirely possible," I protested.

"Possible, yes. Probable, no. I am inclined to think that his frequent journeys were not matters of pleasure."

"Apart from his visits to his daughter."

"Oh, that is elementary," said Pons brusquely. "So, if not pleasure-bent, what then? Mr. Fairlie had access to a cottage on the coast of Wales—he owned such a cottage, Sir Hugh has said. One would have supposed that if he sought rest or pleasure, he would go there. But the evidence is that he went there least of all. Scotland and London. Now, surely, that is ambiguous. We must inquire a little further to learn just where he went in Scotland. At his age, not tramping in the Highlands, certainly. And London! His cut is not that of a man who would haunt the music-halls. Indeed, it might not be amiss to look into the entire pattern of Mr. Fairlie's journeys; perhaps in them lies the answer to the importance of this final journey he did not live to make."

"I believe, with Sir Hugh, that he was certainly coming to see you."

"It is reasonable to think so. He had made a note of our telephone number. He meant to call, once he reached London, and make an appointment."

"Someone suspected and killed him to prevent his doing so."

"Gently, gently, Parker. That is a *non sequitur*. It may have been only coincidence that he was killed at this point. Someone clearly meant him to make no more journeys. Why?"

"Because he felt that something about Mr. Fairlie's journeys threatened him?" I ventured.

"Perhaps," said Pons enigmatically.

"If you ask me," I said stubbornly, "somebody didn't want him to reach you. It's as simple as that."

"Ah, you have an unhappy tendency to see all things as simple, Parker," he said. "Would matters were so! I should think it highly unlikely, on the basis of what we know about Fairlie, that he told anyone of his plans. He has been described as a quiet, secretive man, little given to speech. Does it seem probable to you that such a man would announce his intention of consulting me?"

"Well, no," I admitted reluctantly. "But then something else suggests itself—Fairlie was being watched."

"I am always gratified to observe the felicitous effect of exposure to my little feats of ratiocination," said Pons dryly.

"Then you think me right?"

"Never more so. Fairlie was indeed under some kind of surveillance, for his murderer had to strike at just the right time. He evidently hoped that Fairlie's death would be laid to heart trouble of some kind, and he did not count on the discovery of the body quite so soon. Only the guard's familiarity with Fairlie's habits, perhaps, prevented his plan from being fulfilled. The chloroform was detected—despite the carriage window the murderer opened—and suspicion was aroused. We are dealing with no mean opponent."

"Fairlie obviously underestimated him."

"He may not have known his identity."

"He could hardly have been unaware of being under surveillance," I said. "Surely, in a town like Frome, and for a man who has lived here so long, he would have been aware of someone—stranger or one familiar to him—too frequently nearby."

"He may never have suspected it," countered Pons. "He seems to have been a man involved with matters that concerned him exclusive of all else. Then, too, I suspect that we are dealing with someone who, if he undertook to keep Fairlie in view, would not always present the same appearance."

"But the fact that he was coming to consult you," I put in, "surely suggests that Fairlie knew or suspected something beyond his power to handle."

"That is a possibility—even a probability," conceded Pons. "We have, however, no knowledge that it is so. We can only conjecture. Clearly, it was not at this point sufficient to warrant involving the police. But there are one or two little things that may have escaped your notice, Parker."

"I would be happy to hear of them."

"It did not strike you as curious that Mr. Fairlie's journeys should have so markedly increased in the past two years?"

"Not at all," I answered. "His companion had died. What more natural but that he should attempt to fill the vacuum left at Farway's death in some such manner?"

"Ah, that is cogently put. It may be. In time of stress or emotional difficulty, there is a normal tendency on the part of many human beings to take flight. But I submit that there may very well have been some other reason for Mr. Fairlie's absence from the estate he was obliged to manage, as Sir Hugh put it."

"What else?"

"There is the curious lack of obvious motive. Mr. Fairlie could not have been a wealthy man; in any event, his daughter is—as far as we know—his only legal heir. One could hardly suspect Mr. Fairlie of being involved in a crime of passion—though it is not impossible. We are left then with the clear suggestion that for some reason—which is certainly dark as of now—Mr. Fairlie alive was dangerous to someone.

"No mention has been made of robbery as motive, for all that Mr. Fairlie was searched. What then was the object of that search? I submit that something Mr. Fairlie knew or suspected, or something he possessed—was so dangerous to someone else that only Mr. Fairlie's death could diminish that danger.

"But we are not yet in possession of enough facts to warrant any but the most elementary conclusions. Let us just sleep on it."

II. FARWAY HALL

In mid-morning Sir Hugh Parrington made his appearance. We had had less than five hours' sleep, and I suspected that Pons had slept little of that time, for I had heard him about now and then as I was drifting off in the early hours. The Chief Constable, however, was fresh and in high spirits, as if he expected Pons to present the constabulary with a solution to Mr. Fairlie's death in a matter of hours.

As we drove toward Farway House, Sir Hugh kept up a constant stream of talk with a bluff heartiness clearly integral to him. Was it not possible, he now wondered, that Fairlie's killer had not meant to kill him, but only to render him unconscious so that he could be

searched? Unless one accepted the premise of a professional robber equipped with chloroform, which was admittedly far fetched — one could only conclude that a considerable premeditation was involved.

Pons smiled, with visible patience. He dismissed the Chief Constable's theory with a mere shake of his head. "I take it," he said, "you've interviewed the booking-clerk. I believe the Inspector said something to that effect."

"Done right away," said Sir Hugh.

"There could not have been many travelers who looked forward to reaching London in the early hours."

"Four. But who's to say the fellow who did Fairlie in got on at Frome? Perhaps he was on the train."

"Unlikely," said Pons brusquely. "Who got on here?"

"Well, seven people got on here — four for London. Fairlie and Gerald Farway, the old man's nephew, who spends most of his time at the Hall. They were known to the booking-clerk. They got on independently, apparently — neither knew the other was traveling, and Farway's presumably still in London at this moment. Farway went first-class, Fairlie third. One fellow, a Mr. Max Stubbs, a salesman, frequented the line; he was bound for Westbury. He'd come into Frome yesterday morning on his route from Exeter. He made it regularly. One was a woman no one knew, but I should think it unlikely a woman could have done it. Besides, she traveled first-class, too. The other three Mr. Nichols didn't know. He'll come on again at five if you want to talk to him."

"The others," prompted Pons.

Sir Hugh shrugged. "Oh, men — two of them — between thirty and fifty. Nichols judged. The one was bearded. The third was an old fellow. Nichols guessed him to be in his seventies. All bundled up against the wind. Walked with a cane and a little unsteady on his feet. That's the lot."

"What of fingerprints in the compartment?" I put in.

The Chief Constable shook his head. "Oh, Doctor — dozens of fingerprints. You may be sure whoever killed Jonas Fairlie came prepared. We won't find his. We're doing all this routine work, of course — there's no need for Pons to spend his energies at it."

Pons sat in reflective silence.

"Surely, there were other travelers in that carriage," I said.

"Only two people. A woman traveling from Exeter to London,

and a clergyman who had got on at Castle Cary."

"Have they been reached?"

"Oh, yes. Our men are efficient, Doctor, believe me – even to the point of resenting Solar Pons a little. They'll get over that."

"Could they have heard anything in their compartments?" I asked.

"Nothing. The train's hardly quiet, but then, in all likelihood, the way it was done wouldn't allow for much noise, would it now?" Sir Hugh looked at me earnestly as he spoke, his eyes intent. "He was got hold of and the chloroform pressed over his face, all in a moment. He'd hardly have time to cry out. He had time only to scratch the fellow. It must have been done just out of Frome – when he was found his body was still warm. No sign of rigor."

"And whoever did it could have slipped off the train as it slowed down along the line."

"Or stayed on to mingle with the rest of the passengers," said Sir Hugh. "We can't detain a trainload of people."

Pons came to sudden life. "They are examining the line?"

"They're at it now, Pons, looking to see if anyone jumped off. But here we are at the Hall."

As the Chief Constable spoke, the car turned off the road and into a driveway through a gate flanked by stone pillars crowned with Georgian vases. The driveway led between banks of rhododendron that presently gave way and disclosed a handsome, ivied late-Georgian house of dark red brick. The house was of two floors, with an attic storey above the cornice. The entrance was framed by attached Doric columns and crowned by a curved pediment, and the whole doorway was cased in wood painted white.

I observed, as we got out of the car, that we were on a pronounced rise, and said so.

"Yes, this is Gibbet Hill," said the Chief Constable.

"Ah," said Pons. "This is then the place where the unhappy ringleaders of the local inhabitants who took part in Monmouth's rebellion were hanged."

"Yes, that is so," said Sir Hugh. "Two hundred and fifty years ago."

The view from the front of the house was impressively beautiful. In the west rose the limestone of the Mendips, all combs and caves among the rocks. The river Frome could be seen winding northwards toward the Avon through meadows, and to the east were

more hills reaching to the edge of Salisbury Plain. Hills and downland stretched away in all directions save to the northeast, where the country lay in flat green meadows.

The front door was opened to us before Sir Hugh could apply himself to the bronze knocker. A butler held the door wide.

"Lady Farway is expecting you, sir," he said as Sir Hugh announced himself. "Please follow me. She is waiting in the upstairs sitting-room."

He led us down the hall to a quasi-spiral staircase, rather more of the mid-Georgian period than the late, with slender turned balusters standing on the treads, columnar newels, and a ramped handrail. As we were mounting the stairs, a door below opened a little way and someone looked up at us—a dark faced woman of thirty or more, with her black hair drawn straight back away from her forehead and down across her ears, startling me, for I thought at first that she was coloured, rather than only very dark of skin. Her face was cold and expressionless, and she looked at us only briefly before she withdrew and closed the door once more. Pons, I saw, had also noticed, but the Chief Constable apparently had not.

Lady Farway reclined on a chaise longue near one wall of a conservatively but expensively appointed room. Her hair, for all that she was in her early seventies, was still dark and only streaked with grey. She had very dark eyes and a fine, sensitive mouth under a sharply defined nose. Her skin was remarkably free of signs of age, but it was evident that she was not in good health, for there was a marked, almost febrile fragility about her, and her colour was unnaturally high. She smiled at sight of the Chief Constable, but it was only a tremulous, troubled smile that vanished almost at once.

"A dreadful thing, Hugh," she said. "Who would have harmed Jonas?"

"We have brought in the best assistance," said the Chief Constable, and introduced us.

Lady Farway acknowledged us graciously. "I do remember your name, Mr. Pons, in connection with that dreadful tragedy at Yeovil. I hope you can help us to learn why anyone should want to kill Mr. Fairlie." She shuddered a little and raised one thin-fingered hand to her lips, as if to brush away her words.

"I will try," said Pons with unbecoming modesty. "But we need to know more about Mr. Fairlie, to begin with."

"Anything we can do, Mr. Pons, we will do."

"Did you know that he was going to London, Lady Farway?"

"No, Mr. Pons."

"Might anyone in this house have known it?"

"I should be very much surprised if anyone knew," she replied. "Mr. Fairlie was a very reticent man. He came and went as he pleased. Once a month he came to me with the reports. I seldom saw more of him. I had every confidence in him, just as my husband had. They were well, I suppose one might say, inseparable. Charles depended on him and Jonas in turn on Charles. You must understand that Sir Charles saved Mr. Fairlie's life in the war."

"Ah," said Pons.

"But, of course, they had known each other casually before. They belonged to some sort of club—they were sportsmen of some kind, though Mr. Fairlie was not originally from Frome."

"Indeed," said Pons.

"No, he came from Swindon."

"What was the nature of Mr. Fairlie's reports, Lady Farway?"

"He took care of the estate and of Farway Printers—our business. He was a most exact and exacting manager. I suppose you might say that he was so exact that he might have been created for his position. He was precise and very honest, scrupulously honest—and he expected the same kind of honesty from everyone else."

Pons sat quite still, his fingers tented before him. "Looking back now, Lady Farway," he said presently, "can you say that Mr. Fairlie's attitude differed in any particular since Sir Charles's death?"

A small wrinkle grew and deepened on Lady Farway's forehead. For a few moments she sat in silence, visibly trying to assess importance against unimportance in what she recalled. "Of course," she said finally, "he was upset by Charles's death."

"Beyond that."

"He did seem preoccupied. He took to going off more frequently. I was told by members of the household. But I hardly noticed, to tell the truth. There have been so many sad events in our family, ever since our son's death. My brother-in-law Austin—fallen to his death—our nephew Ronald drowned—now Jonas. Mr. Pons, one of the tragedies of growing old is seeing one's world pass away before one's eyes. All we have left now are our niece Rebecca, and Gerald, our nephew, Austin's son, and Robert, Henry's son, whom we see

all too seldom since he began his studies at Edinburgh years ago. He means to become a doctor, and there is no end to their work in preparation. Gerald is with us here from time to time, and Rebecca keeps me company constantly."

"Harrumph," trumpeted Sir Hugh. "You've forgotten Jill."

"Oh, yes, Jill - but we seldom see her and we don't often speak of her."

"Wild," added the Chief Constable.

"She lives in London or Paris - or both," said Lady Farway. "For some strange reason, she's become an artist. One of these - what do you call them? impressionists? After Cézanne or Van Gogh or somebody like that."

Plainly, an artist's life was thought somewhat bizarre and Lady Farway preferred not to talk of her niece Jill.

"Let us return for the moment to the late Mr. Fairlie," said Pons. "Can you think of any motive for his murder?"

"None, Mr. Pons."

"He had no enemies? I should think someone who demanded strict honesty of all his associates might be resented in some quarters."

"I knew of no one. But how can one say? What you suggest is very possible, true. A man discharged at the business at his instruction might have hated him for it. Like so many strictly honest people, Jonas was unyielding. Transgressions must be punished so he believed, and he couldn't abide slovenly work either here or at the works. Perhaps you should inquire there. Ask for Mr. Bramshaw."

"Thank you," said Pons. "Do you know who are Mr. Fairlie's heirs?"

"I believe his daughter Diana is his only heir."

"We don't want to tire you," put in Sir Hugh. "If this is wearing - we can return at another time."

She brushed this aside with a languid gesture, and nodded to Pons, inviting him to carry on.

"Can you recall any circumstances in recent years that altered or in any marked way affected Mr. Fairlie's character or way of life?" asked Pons then.

"None. Oh, the frequency of his recent journeys, yes. But we all thought that was natural after my husband died." She paused thoughtfully and looked briefly away, a troubled shadow briefly in her eyes. "If it had been Charles. . . ." She left her sentence unfinished.

"Do go on, Lady Farway."

"There was that occasion a month before Charles died. He and Mr. Fairlie went away together. No one knows where. Neither of them said either at that time or afterward. But when he came back, Charles was beside himself. I never knew him to be so agitated. There were long conferences with his lawyer—there were discharges from the staff and from the works. We assumed that something had gone wrong with the business, which Sir Charles was not in the habit of discussing with me. And, of course, he died within a month of that time—so if he had meant to speak to me about it, he never had the opportunity."

"How did he die, Lady Farway?"

"My husband suffered a cerebral thrombosis. He tried desperately to tell me something, but he couldn't speak. Our doctor, however, said that this was an entirely natural reaction, and what Charles may have wanted to say may have been totally inconsequential. He died within a day of his attack, and was comatose for most of that time."

"None of your husband's brothers survives?"

"None, Mr. Pons. Henry died many years ago. Robert and Rebecca are his children. Austin passed away four years ago. Gerald and Jill are his. Ronald was also his son. That is our entire family."

"And your heirs?"

"I wish I knew, Mr. Pons," she answered with a wan smile. "My husband's will left me the house and to share the control and administration with Mr. Fairlie, but until my death no one knows who will inherit our estate. Though I suppose Mr. Abercrombie does."

"His solicitor?"

"Yes."

"A Frome man," put in Sir Hugh.

"You would appear to be a closely knit family," observed Pons.

"I think we are. Particularly since my husband's brothers died. Perhaps it was only natural that our nieces and nephews should come to us. Sir Charles made it possible for Jill to become an artist—gave employment to Gerald—saw to it that Robert could leave the study of law for medicine. Rebecca became my own companion."

"And Ronald?"

Lady Farway smiled. "Ronald was always the independent one."

"I take it, Lady Farway," said Pons bluntly, "that neither Austin nor Henry was a man of means."

"That was unhappily true, Mr. Pons. They were all at one time in the business. Farway Printers, Ltd. is widely known, and has been established for some time. My father-in-law started it on a small scale, but it expanded very rapidly. The three Farway sons inherited it, but Charles finally won control. There was some disagreement, though it was unpleasant only in Henry's case, and in my opinion Henry's wife was the cause of that. Charles bought out his brothers as long as fifteen years ago. Neither of them seems to have been provident, and neither much suited to success in any other venture."

The door of the room opened suddenly, and the dark-haired young lady I had observed watching us while we mounted the stairs stood there. She gazed darkly at us, but her look was unfathomable. Then she came softly into the room, her expression all solicitous, her eyes only for Lady Farway.

"Don't you think you may be tiring yourself, Aunt Ellen?" she asked.

Lady Farway smiled. "Never fear," she said to her and, turning again to us, added, "This is our niece, Rebecca."

The young woman looked toward us. Her gaze was a challenge—not unfriendly, but decidedly reserved. She acknowledged the introduction with a wintry smile, excused herself, and drew away from the divan.

"They are all as attentive as if I were their own mother," said Lady Farway. "Our nephews as well as our nieces. When I was taken ill a year ago, Robert sent down a specialist from Harley Street."

"Miss Rebecca may be right," said Pons. "There is no need to impose on you further at this time, Lady Farway."

Miss Rebecca flashed Pons an appreciative glance. It was surprising to see how that dark face lit up when she smiled.

"We should like now to examine Mr. Fairlie's quarters," said Pons.

"Rebecca will show you there, sir," said Lady Farway. "Certainly," said Rebecca, and turned at once to the door.

Mr. Fairlie's quarters consisted of an apartment at the southwest corner of the second storey. The apartment was little more than one rather large room, with a bathroom adjoining it. The room was sparsely furnished, containing but a minimum of furniture, and that austere. A crowded desk occupied one corner, and what was

manifestly a divan was certainly also used as a bed by night, whatever its disguise by day. Though it had not been used — since Mr. Fairlie had departed early in the previous evening — it was in some disarray. Indeed, the entire room presented an appearance of disorder, minimal, to be sure, as if Mr. Fairlie's departure had been so hasty that he had not had time to set it right.

Having shown us to the room, Miss Rebecca excused herself and withdrew. I thought, judging by the somewhat startled expression she wore, that the appearance of the room surprised her.

Pons glanced at the Chief Constable. "The police have not been here?"

"Not yet," said Sir Hugh.

Pons took a turn around the room, peered into the bathroom, bent over the divan, pulling at the covers that concealed its real nature as a bed, lingered at the desk.

"I fear we are a trifle late," he said. "This room has almost certainly been searched."

"Then it must have been by a member of the household."

"I submit that a member of the household would have had time to put the room to rights. You must have observed Miss Rebecca's surprise at sight of it. No, it was searched in haste and — if I am not in error — after Fairlie was killed."

Sir Hugh's florid face betrayed his astonishment. "You are surely not suggesting that the fellow killed Fairlie and then came here to search his quarters?" he cried.

"If he failed to find on Fairlie's person what he sought — and we have reason to believe he did so fail — it would be only logical that he search here."

"Preposterous!"

"Let us not be hasty, Sir Hugh. It had to be done last night or not at all. Once Fairlie's body was discovered, his quarters would come under the attention of the police."

"But no one has reported any evidence of breaking and entering."

Pons shrugged. "A window left open — a door unlatched. I put it to you that gaining entrance was perhaps the least of the difficulties such an enterprising man as our murderer might encounter."

"But what could he have wanted that he took such desperate measures?"

"We have already asked ourselves that," said Pons dryly. "We can be certain that its importance cannot be overestimated."

The Chief Constable said soberly, "Well now, Pons, you open up

some interesting possibilities – very interesting. It must have been someone who knew Fairlie well, if not intimately.”

“Elementary.”

“Who was familiar with his quarters.”

“Or, with his habits, his reputation, his person,” finished Pons. “It was evident that when he entered the railway coach where Fairlie sat that Fairlie was not alarmed or believed he had no reason for alarm. He was quite clearly taken by surprise, gripped firmly by the back of the neck while chloroform was pressed upon his face. It could have been done only immediately out of Frome. He was then searched and his effects were searched. It was certainly not done by anyone Fairlie distrusted, unless his murderer was in disguise.”

“The scrap of paper with your address on it was not discovered.”

“Or ignored as meaningless. I submit, however, that what Fairlie’s murderer sought was something of more bulk. He had, in any case, too little time to be more thorough. He had to open a window – go through Fairlie’s bag – and, having failed to find what he was after, he had to get off the train, and make his way to this house. There was only a minimum of time before the guard might look in on his passengers.”

“Why, he must have been at it even while the body was being discovered and we were at work.”

“It is possible.”

“Highly likely!” exclaimed the Chief Constable. “What a bold fellow! But did he find here what he was looking for?”

“I doubt it.”

“Why do you say so?”

“Consider. Not a square inch of this room has been left untouched. Even the pictures on the walls have been moved and the rugs taken up. The desk and the bed did not yield it, and these were the likeliest places. So all else was looked into. We may find that even the mattress has been opened.”

The Chief Constable crossed the room to the divan, pulled up the covering, and scrutinized the mattress. He turned and looked over his shoulder.

“By Gad, Pons. You’re right. There are slits here – made recently.”

Pons crossed to his side and palpated the mattress near the slits indicated by Sir Hugh.

“This was poorly made. It has the feel of being stuffed with paper at these points,” he said. “Is that not suggestive?”

"It must be an old mattress."

"Oh, that is inconsequential," said Pons impatiently. "We can now reasonably conclude that what is being sought is paper of some kind. The mattress has been slit only where its packing on palpation suggests paper. And something bulkier, obviously, than could be carried in the lining of a hat."

"So Fairlie had a document of some kind. Is that what you are suggesting, Pons?"

"It would seem so."

"But what?"

"Ah, that we are not yet in position to say. It may have been something pertaining to the business - stocks or bonds - it may have been a signed paper which placed someone in jeopardy. We may be certain that whatever it was did endanger the murderer."

"Evidence of some criminal act, for example."

"Perhaps."

"But that suggests he knew Fairlie had it."

Pons shook his head. "Not necessarily. He may only have guessed. Not having found it now, he may conclude that he was in error, that someone else has it, or that Fairlie hid it so well that he will have to look elsewhere for it."

"We're going too fast," said the Chief Constable. "If that were the case, what need would Fairlie have to call on you?"

"He may not have been coming to consult me about whatever it was he had in hiding," Pons pointed out.

"Improbable."

"Not at all. I should think, however, that these matters are related. If Fairlie had possession of an important document for some time - there is nothing to show how long he may have had it, though," he added cryptically. "I should be inclined to believe it was not more than seven years nor less than two - it would hardly have sent him to 7B now. But that his purpose in coming to see me might be in some way related to whatever he had kept secret is neither impossible nor too improbable. He was clearly involved - and deeply - in the affairs of the Farways, particularly the printing business. Indeed, he seems to have been involved considerably more deeply than Lady Farway herself."

"Charlie always believed that business is no place for a woman," said Sir Hugh. "He never brought his troubles home. You heard her say as much."

"I did, indeed. So that, in a sense, Lady Farway has for these past two years been at Mr. Fairlie's mercy."

"You put it strangely."

"I meant to do so."

The Chief Constable shook his head wonderingly. "This whole matter—as Alice said—is becoming curiouser and curiouser."

"Is it not!" cried Pons enthusiastically. "I should like to have known Mr. Fairlie. A pity he was not permitted to complete his final journey."

He now went back to the desk and began a most methodical examination of its contents—envelopes, notepaper, and the accoutrements of a man of business affairs, account books, ledgers, and the like; but there were, I saw, only a few papers that interested Pons—a letter or two, a blank pad, a page or two of random notes. The blank pad especially intrigued Pons; from it he turned to the wicker wastebasket under the desk and went through its contents with some care, though he did not evidently find what he sought—plainly, I inferred, the page or pages torn from the pad of notepaper.

Next he pulled open the drawers of the desk, one by one, and examined their contents; but there was nothing in them that gave him much pause. Then came the surface of the desk, from which he moved to other surfaces in the room, and the jambs of door and windows.

"Wiped clean of fingerprints?" guessed Sir Hugh.

"No, no. But I should say, as with the compartment on the train, that whoever searched this room wore gloves." He held fast still to the papers he had collected from Fairlie's desk. "I shall want these for a little while."

"By all means," said the Chief Constable.

"I have no doubt your men will put everyone in the house through it," said Pons then. "I may wish to speak to some of them later. For the time being, however, I think we are done here. If you will be so kind as to drive us back to the George, I will pursue my inquiry from that post."

III. THE POOR COUSINS

Once back at the George, I felt my lack of sleep. Though Pons himself, as always when he was pressing an investigation, was alert and untired, he urged me to rest for a few hours. I lost no time in stretching out on the bed and fell asleep immediately.

I awoke in mid-afternoon with a hearty sneeze.

"Ah, Parker," said Pons. "I'm sorry that my examination of Mr. Fairlie's papers woke you."

"The room is filled with pepper!" I cried.

"A capital deduction," he replied with a thin smile. "I needed something with which to dust this pad. Pepper was the handiest substance. Unfortunately, since this is certainly the second sheet — perhaps even the third — under that written upon, it is of little help."

I was now on my feet and walked over to the table at which Pons was at work. The pad, still covered with a coating of pepper, to which Pons seemed to be impervious, though I sneezed yet again, lay before him. The pepper outlined but a few markings, which I saw at a glance could have conveyed no meaning to Pons. The top line was one of indistinct figures which could only have signified a date; the second line consisted of letters — "G. A.," and the third of more of the same: "R. H.," with a fourth of two more letters "J. H." The rest of it was simply too blurred to be read. I sneezed again.

"You can hardly make anything out of that," I said.

"Yet someone thought it of sufficient importance to remove the sheet Fairlie had written, as well as one or two of the sheets below," retorted Pons. "These sheets were not in the wastepaper-basket at Fairlie's desk; furthermore, material in the basket dated as far as a week back; so it is reasonable to assume that it was not Fairlie who tore away the sheets from this pad."

"Perhaps it is a cryptogram of some sort," I ventured.

Pons merely shook his head impatiently. "These notes — and we may be certain that only their beginning shows here — were important to Fairlie and they were of equal importance to whoever took his life."

"Is there anything else?" I asked.

"Only this," said Pons, and handed me a brief letter addressed to the dead man.

"DEAR SIR:

"In the matter about which you make inquiry Mr. Gerald was not at his desk on August 16 and 17, 1937.

"Respectfully,
"RALPH BRAMSHAW."

"You will note that it is on the stationery of Farway Printers. Evidently Gerald Farway is employed there."

"Ah, and Fairlie was checking up on him," I said.

"It would seem so."

"A martinet."

"Sir Hugh spoke of him as a good manager," said Pons. "But observe the date of Bramshaw's letter. Does not this suggest something other to you?"

The date on the letter was April 7, 1938. "It is certainly late to make an inquiry," I said.

"Is it not! And what could it matter to the efficiency of the printing works so many months after the event?"

"Unless Gerald Farway was in the habit of absenting himself from his post," I ventured.

"I am inclined to think, rather, that Fairlie's inquiry had nothing to do with Gerald Farway's usefulness to the business," said Pons thoughtfully.

I took issue with Pons. "Surely it isn't impossible that Fairlie, in his capacity as general manager of the business and the estate, might be preparing a bill of particulars against Gerald Farway?"

"The possibility exists," said Pons with such an enigmatic air that I could not help but feel that his meaning was not the same as mine.

"And he may just have learned of Gerald's absence from work on those days," I continued, "and only now got around to inquiring about it."

"It is not improbable," agreed Pons amiably. "But it remains a curious instance. Would it not be more likely to have confirmation from Bramshaw of a series of delinquencies all at once? But here we have a single, isolated date—eight months before the date of this letter to Fairlie. And why a letter? Surely Fairlie could have telephoned for this information."

"It may not have been at Bramshaw's fingertips. He may have had to institute an inquiry. Fairlie may simply have asked him to send the information around when he had turned it up."

"True."

So saying, Pons returned to the letters outlined in pepper on Fairlie's pad. He had now copied them, but he scrutinized the pad once again, trying—in vain—to read more of what had been written on it. At last, however, he abandoned his scrutiny and tipped

the pad into the wastepaper-basket, loosing a cloud of pepper into the room. We were both set to sneezing.

We had hardly done when there was a tap on the door. Pons sprang at once to open it.

A young man in his thirties stood there—blond, blue-eyed, scowling. An air of truculence was unmistakable in his attitude.

"Mr. Solar Pons?" he asked.

At Pons's nod, he walked into the room.

"Mr. Gerald Farway, I presume," said Pons.

Our visitor neither bothered to affirm nor deny Pons's assumption, which had clearly been based, prosaically, on an initialed scarf around his neck. He said only, "I learned that you were acting for the Chief Constable in making inquiries into the death of Jonas Fairlie. Since I must be out of Frome today, I felt I had better come round to talk with you. I looked first for Sir Hugh, but couldn't find him. I'm sure you know I was on the 9:13 last night."

"Pray sit down, Mr. Farway."

"I'd rather stand, if you don't mind," said Farway. He took his stance somewhat belligerently before the now closed door. "They tell me Fairlie was murdered. I consider that preposterous."

"Ah, small wonder! The facts, however, are clear enough."

"Outside of the business, he didn't have an enemy."

"But he had some at the works?"

Farway shrugged impatiently. "Fairlie was forever poking his nose into the affairs of the business, demanding greater efficiency, and the lot. This hardly makes for popularity."

"And rarely for murder," put in Pons. "I understand there had been sackings."

"Certainly of no importance. The biggest changes took place a month or so before my uncle died—but they were in the making for a long time. They'd been building up, you might say, and my uncle just got around at that time to ordering them carried out."

Pons nodded and seemed to dismiss the sackings at the works from his thoughts. "Mr. Farway, I assume you saw and heard nothing untoward on the train to London last night."

"Nothing," replied Farway. "I was in first—he in third-class. We were separated by several carriages. I wasn't even aware that he was on the train. You must know by this time that Fairlie was a very independent man. He came and went as he pleased. He didn't have to report to anyone, though he did see my aunt at least once a

month. Few of us at the house were ever aware of his comings and goings."

"You live at the Hall?"

"Ever since I took a place in the business. At least, I am there most of the time."

"And your position in the business?"

"I am the assistant manager."

"Under Mr. Bramshaw?"

Farway nodded, flashing Pons a quick glance of surprise at Pons's knowledge of his superior's name.

"Mr. Farway, you were absent from the works on August 16 and 17, last year," said Pons then.

Our visitor's face darkened. He stared hard at Pons before answering. "How can you know that, sir?"

Without a word, Pons handed him Bramshaw's letter to Jonas Fairlie.

Farway read it at a glance. His brow was knitted with suspicion now, and he was a trifle reluctant to return it to Pons. "How did you come by this, Mr. Pons?"

"It was found on Mr. Fairlie's desk."

"Ah, you searched his room."

"Under the Chief Constable's supervision," said Pons. "Can you now remember where you were on those dates?"

Farway's scowl deepened; his face grew darker with colour. "That is my private affair."

"As you wish," said Pons amiably. "Mr. Fairlie evidently did not think so. Are you frequently absent from the works, Mr. Farway?"

"Other than on the business of the firm, I have been absent only once before," answered Farway without hesitation. "I can assure you that my absence had nothing—I repeat, *nothing*—whatever to do with Mr. Fairlie's death."

Pons smiled. "It is only that he had been inquiring into it," he said.

"And I can't explain that, either," Farway put in. "It may have been his right to do so."

"He did not speak to you about it?"

"No."

"Nor make any reference—however indirect, to it?" pressed Pons. "Some time has elapsed since this information came into his hands. Yet he did not once bring the matter up to you?"

"He did not."

"Curious! Curious!" murmured Pons. "Tell me, what was Mr. Fairlie's precise position in relation to the printing business? Mr. Bramshaw here signs himself as in authority."

"Mr. Bramshaw is the manager," said Farway, an edge of resentment showing in his voice. "It's only that my uncle—that is, Sir Charles—left specific instructions that Fairlie was to continue in control. By 'control' he meant that Fairlie was to exercise the same kind of ultimate authority that my uncle himself exercised. He doesn't—and didn't—have any official position in the business, but the works is part of my uncle's estate, and Mr. Fairlie is the administrator and does exercise final control."

"He never occupied an office at the works? Not even prior to your uncle's death?"

"Not Fairlie. He was my uncle's liaison man, and we all understood that he spoke for my uncle, who never came to the business when he could send Fairlie in his place."

"So that, in fact, Mr. Fairlie never discharged anyone?"

"In most cases, no. My uncle ordered any discharges that took place during his lifetime. And there have been only two since he died. I suppose Mr. Fairlie may have had a hand in those, yes, but I wouldn't be prepared to say that he did. I'd say those two men had asked for it—careless in their work, cheating on time, and all that. But whether it was Mr. Bramshaw put it up to Fairlie or the other way round I couldn't say."

Pons took a turn around the room, while Farway followed him with his eyes. He came back to our visitor. "Thinking back now, Mr. Farway, can you hit upon any reason anyone would want to kill Mr. Fairlie?"

"None," replied Farway emphatically and without hesitation. "I still think the idea preposterous. The only solution that occurs to me is that he may have been mistaken for someone else."

"Not likely. Mr. Fairlie was murdered with deliberate intent. His effects and his quarters were searched."

Our visitor's eyes widened. "His quarters?" he repeated, amazed. "But when?"

"Evidently immediately after his murder."

"Incredible!"

"But inescapable."

"Why, old Fairlie didn't have a thing anybody else'd want

scoffed Farway. "He was tight-fisted enough—he had money in the banks and he wasn't what I'd call poor—but there certainly wasn't anything on his person or in his rooms to tempt anyone."

Pons appeared to meditate briefly. "And in the household, Mr. Farway—was Mr. Fairlie obtrusive, demanding?"

"Quite the contrary. He was like a ghost—and of late he acted as if he were haunted himself."

"Indeed!" cried Pons sharply. "Preoccupied?"

"Haunted!" said Farway again, emphatically.

"In fear?"

"No, sir. It wasn't fear. It was more like the attitude of a man who had a very disagreeable task—a hateful obligation—to perform, and who knew he must do it no matter how much he bucked at it."

Pons's eyes positively glowed now. He began to stroke and tug at the lobe of his left ear. "And all the more a task for one so customarily reticent, I daresay."

"Yes, you might put it so. To be honest about him, Fairlie wasn't one who liked to use his authority. Not that he ever backed away from what he had to do, but just that it troubled him too much. I remember once, long ago, Rebecca did some little thing—oh, I no longer remember what it was—but Fairlie thought it important and brought it to my uncle's attention. Rebecca was reprimanded—and it bothered Fairlie for weeks—weeks! Some little thing of no significance, really, except to someone with Fairlie's Victorian outlook."

"An old-fashioned gentleman?"

"Rather!"

"So that if Mr. Fairlie had a highly disagreeable task, its importance might have seemed exaggerated."

"Exactly."

Pons nodded in some satisfaction. "Now, then," he went on, "do the initials G. A., R. H., and J. H. mean anything to you?"

Farway, a little surprised at Pons's change of subject, repeated the initials aloud, twice. He stood in deep thought for a few moments, teetering on his toes, but at last shook his head, his eyes clouded with perplexity. "I can't say that they do," he said finally. "I suppose if I think long enough, I might come up with one or another name to fit them."

"In connection with Mr. Fairlie?"

Our visitor shook his head anew. "You're asking too much, sir. I knew less of Fairlie's business than he seems to have known of mine."

Suddenly Pons was all brisk activity. "Thank you, Mr. Farway," he said crisply. "We may take the liberty of making some further inquiries later on—after you return to Frome."

Farway bowed a little formally and bade us good-bye.

"Well, that has certainly not added very much to our store of knowledge," I said when Farway's footsteps had ceased to sound.

"You think not?"

"Surely you cannot think otherwise?"

"I submit that Mr. Farway's intelligence was informative," said Pons with an annoyingly patient smile. "He confirms us in our estimate of Mr. Fairlie as a most estimable and conscientious manager. He underscores my conclusion that Mr. Fairlie was not murdered by someone who hated him. It now seems inescapable that he was about a task so disagreeable to him, and of such significance, that he was planning to lay it before me and escape the obligation he could not otherwise avoid when he was murdered. He was killed then because someone did not want him to discharge that obligation."

"You have an odd way of putting it, Pons," I said. "It takes hatred to kill with such deliberation."

"Nonsense, Parker! It takes necessity. Mr. Fairlie had no wealth to stimulate someone's greed—he was patently not involved in a crime of passion—but he was certainly in somebody's way and had to be removed."

"Why?"

"We are on the way to determining that, my dear fellow. Be patient. This is not, I regret to say, one of those little matters that can be solved from an armchair. There are crimes in which the motivation is so clear, and the opportunity so limited, that only a little ratiocination is necessary to solve them. In Mr. Fairlie's case, the motivation is anything but clear—granted that he was in somebody's way, we have as yet no way of knowing for what reason he had to be eliminated."

He might have gone on, had not someone's rapping on the door interrupted him.

"Not another one, surely," muttered Pons, as he opened the door.

One of the hotel page-boys stood there. He had a note on a salver. "Sir," he said to Pons, "a gentleman left this for you."

"Thank you," said Pons, and took the note.

He opened it, read it, and stood for a thoughtful few moments gazing at it. Then he handed it to me.

It was from our erstwhile visitor. "It has just occurred to me," Farway wrote, "that those initials you asked about, must be those of our cousins—Gareth Ainslie, Russell Hattray, and Jennifer Hattray—though I'm blessed as to how they relate to Fairlie."

"We are making some cautious progress," said Pons.

"I don't recall any previous mention of these people 'Our cousins'—perhaps they are the poor relations of the Farway clan."

Pons took a turn or two about the room, hands clasped behind his back. He had lit a pipe of his abominable shag and was puffing away like an express train. I could more readily have tolerated another dose of pepper. His eyes were narrowed, his lips pursed; he ignored what I said for some moments while his thoughts were elsewhere. But presently his gaze met mine once more.

"I think we may have time enough before Sir Hugh joins us for dinner to run around to the station and ask the booking-clerk some questions. It may be we can prod him for some further memory of last night before time dims the details. Let us just walk over to the station; the booking-clerk should have come on duty by the time we reach there."

Jock Nichols proved to be a wiry man in his fifties. He was short, thin faced, with a stubby moustache and bushy eyebrows. He had a no nonsense look about him that said plainly he would not stand still for anybody wasting his time. When Pons introduced himself and brought up the subject of Mr. Fairlie's death, he reacted instantly.

"I gave all my evidence to the police last night," he said primly, as if that were an end to it.

"Ah, there are one or two little points on which I am not clear," said Pons. He took from his pocket the tuft of hair he had pried from the hand of the dead man. "You've told the police that an elderly, bearded gentleman traveled third-class from Frome last night. Did the colour of his beard match that?"

He laid the tuft down before the booking clerk

Nichols stared at it.

Someone pushed up for a ticket. We stepped aside. The ticket sold, we moved in again. Nichols was still examining the tuft of hair.

"How'd you come by it?" he asked finally.

"Found it in Mr. Fairlie's hand," replied Pons.

"Have the police seen it?" He regarded Pons suspiciously.

"Sir Hugh Parrington was with us."

"Oh ah," said Nichols, mollified. "It could have been that colour. I'm not in the habit of looking over the travelers close. My job's to book 'em. If I knew I'd be called upon to remember, I'd do it. I say only it might have been."

"You need say no more, Mr. Nichols." Pons pocketed the tuft of hair, while the booking-clerk looked at him gravely.

All around us now people were stirring in the station, waiting upon the arrival of the 6:50 from the west. Free briefly again, Nichols beckoned Pons closer to his window.

"That old fellow couldn't have done it," he said earnestly. "From what I hear, that is. He *tottered*."

"Indeed," said Pons.

"Must have been one of the younger men."

"You mentioned, I believe, that a woman you didn't know also took the train last night?"

"First-class, first-class," said Nichols peevishly. "As for my not knowing her—she wore a veil; I couldn't see her face."

"So she, too, might have been deliberately concealing her identity?" asked Pons.

Nichols looked at him sharply. "What do you mean by that?"

Pons took the tuft of hair out again and held it between thumb and forefinger. "This is from a wig, Mr. Nichols. We might wonder how much else was false about the passengers on the 9:13 last night."

"As to that, I'm not qualified to say, sir," Nichols shot back. "And I don't know your qualifications, if it comes to it. All I know is Sir Hugh trusts you and I've told all I know."

"One more thing, Mr. Nichols," pursued Pons.

The booking-clerk was all attention now.

"You knew Mr. Fairlie. And the other clerks knew him, too. When was the last time—before last night—you sold him a ticket?"

"I thought that'd come up sooner or later," said Nichols, indulging in a frosty smile. "Three weeks ago."

"Where to?"

"Scotland."

"What station?"

"Glasgow."

"Thank you, Mr. Nichols," said Pons.

We walked back to the George in silence. Pons was not disposed to talk, but went along at a casual gait, turning over in mind the unrelated facts we now had had put before us. He had come to no conclusions about them, and therefore would not speak.

Sir Hugh Parrington waited for us in the lobby of the George. He looked as fresh as if he had slept all day.

"Thought you'd forgotten I was coming to get you for dinner," he said. "Made reservations at the Somerset. You must be famished."

"Now that I think of it, I am," said Pons.

"We can ride or walk, as you like," said Sir Hugh.

Pons chose to walk.

We had hardly set foot on the pavement before Sir Hugh began to talk animatedly, summarizing the police reports that had come in during the day, the result of the routine investigations that had to be made. He recounted the finding of a place almost four miles outside Frome where someone had evidently jumped from the moving train.

"Footprints?" asked Pons.

"The prints were all but obliterated—the ground torn up, that sort of thing. It would be impossible to obtain any sort of cast."

"Then he had to travel back across or around Frome and to the Hall," said Pons. "How much time would that take?"

"Oh, the fellow must have had a motor somewhere. Certainly not far from the railway, and surely not any farther than the eastern edge of Frome. He'd not want it to be conspicuous. Nor would he make himself conspicuous by running. He might reach the Hall in less than an hour—not more than an hour and a half, taking everything into consideration and allowing him the maximum distance to travel on foot. He'd probably avoid Christchurch Street. He'd likely go by way of Lock's Hill and Somerset Road to Nunery—less chance of being seen at that hour. And that would be between ten and eleven."

"The search wouldn't have taken him long either in the carriage or in the Hall," mused Pons. "He could have been away from the Hall well before any alarm about Fairlie went out."

"He could, indeed. A man of some resource and daring."

"Do not eliminate the ladies, Sir Hugh," said Pons dryly. "Some of them are remarkably resourceful."

"I am surprised to hear you say so," said the Chief Constable.

We reached the Somerset and were shown to our table. Once seated, Pons ordered sparingly, as always when he was occupied with some problem. He did not speak until our orders had been taken, and the waiter had left us. Then he leaned toward Sir Hugh.

"Tell us what you can about the Hattrays — Russell and Jennifer, and Gareth Ainslie."

The Chief Constable's jaw fell. He sat for a moment, mouth agape; then he shook his head, as if to emphasize his surprise. "They're cousins of the Farways — the poor cousins, you might say."

"How do they come into the family?"

"Oh, Charlie's father had a sister. Married Fred Hattray. Had two children, who'd be Charlie's first cousins. Esther had one son — that would be Gareth Ainslie, and John had Russell and Jennifer. Esther and John are dead. So is Russell's wife. The other two never married. They live together here."

"Where?"

"North near the river. In Dyer's Close Lane."

Pons cogitated. "If I am not mistaken, that would be rather near to the railway."

"To Radstock, yes."

"Would they be mentioned among the heirs of Charles Farway's estate?"

"Not likely."

"Perhaps they have money invested in the printing business?"

"That's possible. After all, the business goes back a generation beyond Charlie. It was a family venture, and came into Charlie's hands only when he bought control — though he was the one of the three Farway men who ran it in his generation, and the one prepared to do so by the old men."

"Have you any idea of the size of the estate?"

"Counting the business, of course," said Sir Hugh thoughtfully. "I should say it would run into well over a million pounds."

"No small sum," observed Pons.

"But it's all tied up in land, buildings, stock, investments," the Chief Constable went on. "Most of the rich couldn't liquidate in any short time and put that much money down."

"Hattrays and Ainslies now," said Pons. "Are they moneved people?"

"I should say they're moderately well-off."

"Wealthy?"

Sir Hugh shrugged. "What is wealthy, Pons? They don't seem to do much work. They live in a country house—used to be a farm, but there's little farming done there now. Russell once raised cattle, but I don't know whether he still does." He paused suddenly and lowered his voice a little. "There he is now. That's Russell Hattray."

He pointed out a burly man, dark of skin, with thick black hair and very black eyes. He wore a short, carefully trimmed beard.

"He has the look of an Italian," said Pons. "His mother?"

"Italian, yes."

"In his forties, clearly. He was once in the Services."

"Oh, yes, wounded in action. That's why he wears the beard—to conceal the scar."

"A brute of a man."

"Strong as an ox."

Russell Hattray passed out of sight.

"Would you like to meet them?" asked Sir Hugh then.

"Not now."

"I should think it quite unlikely that they were even very well known to Jonas Fairlie, or he to them," the Chief Constable went on.

"In retrospect, Mr. Fairlie impresses me as a man who would know every investor in the business," said Pons. "He appears to have been a thoroughgoing caretaker of the Farway holdings."

"He was that," replied Sir Hugh with equanimity. "He could very probably have told you the amount of every investor's holding, but I doubt that he would have known the colour of Russell Hattray's eyes or the cut of his coat. He was not a man to clutter his mind with inconsequential details."

"I should not have thought so," agreed Pons. "But when I examined that pad we took from his desk—dusted it—"

"With pepper!" I put in bitterly.

The Chief Constable laughed heartily.

Pons waited upon his laughter to subside, then resumed: "I found that Fairlie had jotted down what appeared to be the initials of Ainslee and the Hattrays."

"Incredible!" exclaimed Sir Hugh, his face reflecting his astonishment.

"So that there may well be some connection to which we have no clue."

"I am at a loss to understand what it might be. To tell the truth, there was very little mixing of the families. Charlie had his circle—a very small one, to be sure—and those cousins of his weren't his kind of people. For instance, they were always at hand for the market days—you'd see them there, all three of them—but as for Charlie, never. Why, they are even out of the line of inheritance."

"How many other relatives are there, then?"

"None to my knowledge. And if there were, they'd be even more distantly connected."

"Let us assume that Lady Farway dies."

Sir Hugh knit his brows. His strong blue eyes clouded. In a few moments he spoke thoughtfully. "I didn't know Charlie's intentions, of course, but I knew him, and if I had to predict what he'd be likely to do, I'd say that the estate would be divided among his nieces and nephews, with one of them left in charge of the printing business."

"That would be Gerald," said Pons.

"In all likelihood."

"But supposing there were no nieces or nephews?"

Sir Hugh looked at him blankly for a moment. Then he smiled. "Aha! I see what you're getting at, Pons. But that's pretty far-fetched, you know. There *are* nieces and nephews—healthy, too."

The waiter began to bring our food. For a while then all was silence. Pons ate rapidly, as was his custom; food, much as he appreciated it, was invariably secondary to the problem in hand, and he treated it as a necessity and nothing more. The Chief Constable and I took our time. Sir Hugh's brow, I noticed, remained furrowed; he was obviously turning over what Pons had inferred and not looking favourably upon it.

"There is one little factor we must not overlook," said Pons, when he had finished. "It may be more important than we think. It may have no bearing at all on Mr. Fairlie's death."

"What's that?" demanded Sir Hugh.

"That journey Farway took with Fairlie a month before Farway's death. Lady Farway said that on his return her husband consulted his lawyer. Perhaps it had some bearing on the distribution of the estate."

"Possibly," conceded the Chief Constable grudgingly.

"I mean to talk to Mr. Abercrombie tomorrow."

"A cold fish. You'll get nothing out of him. He's a stickler for the rules."

"We shall see."

"I know him."

"Evidently Farway did, too. Abercrombie may have been his lawyer, but Mr. Fairlie was left as administrator," said Pons.

"Precisely."

"By the way," said Pons then, "there is one other little thing. In addition to those initials, Fairlie had written a date on that pad. Presumably there were other dates I suspect there were but only the one showed up. It had been jotted down just above the initials. August 16 17, 1937. Does that have any family significance?"

Sir Hugh's white brows contracted, then shot up. "August 17, 1937, was the day Ronald Farway drowned."

IV. MR. ABERCROMBIE'S RETICENCE

When I awoke next morning, Pons had gone out. He had spent the evening in deep thought, saying not a word; and it was evident to me that he had opened up some deeper vein in the problem in which we were involved, and was pursuing it. He was still lost in thought when I fell asleep.

At his return in late morning, he offered no word of explanation.

"Ah, you are up," he said. "We have an appointment with Mr. Abercrombie at eleven, and we have just time to walk over to his office in Cheap Street."

"You telephoned?"

"I thought it best. He seemed to me remarkably lacking in enthusiasm," he said dryly. "Come, let us be off."

Cheap Street was only across Market Place from the George a narrow, old-world street with a stream flowing along its gutter. It was an old corner of Frome, a street of great charm, filled principally with shops, restaurants, chemists, hairdressers and a few offices. In this setting Mr. Douglas Abercrombie fitted quite satisfactorily.

He proved to be a tall, bony man, with a dour expression on his lantern-jawed face, framed in grey sideboards; and his eyes, looking out under unkempt and shaggy brows, were wary.

"I cannot imagine why you have come to see me, Mr. Pons," he

said, directly upon his introduction to me. "I had very little to do with Fairlie—very little. But do sit down, gentlemen."

He sat down cautiously himself, behind a desk that must have been a valuable antique.

"Ah, it was not about Mr. Fairlie that I came," said Pons, "but about the affairs of the late Sir Charles Farway."

Mr. Abercrombie visibly tightened up.

"I understand you were his solicitor, Mr. Abercrombie," Pons went on.

"Yes, sir."

"It is specifically about his will that I wished to ask," said Pons.

"A delicate matter, Mr. Pons," said Abercrombie. "Very delicate. I cannot be expected to violate the ethics of my profession."

"Indeed not," agreed Pons.

"What is it then?" asked Abercrombie.

"You may recall that about a month before Sir Charles Farway's sudden death he came to you in the company of the late Mr. Fairlie. Presumably at that time he drew up a new will."

A fox-like expression took over the lawyer's face. "That he did, Mr. Pons. I remember it well."

"Can you recall any specific points about that new will, Mr. Abercrombie?"

Mr. Abercrombie smiled. He looked relieved. "Mr. Pons, I have not the slightest idea of the contents of that will."

Now it was Pons's turn to be surprised.

"I remember that day very well," Mr. Abercrombie went on. "Sir Charles came in with Mr. Fairlie. Sir Charles was very agitated—very agitated; indeed, I have never seen a man more upset. Mr. Fairlie, on the other hand, was very calm, very grave yes, but very much in control of himself. 'Abercrombie,' Sir Charles said, 'I am about to draw up a new will—I will set it down myself. Jonas will witness it, and so will one of your clerks. You will be able to testify that I wrote it out.' He sat down then and there to this desk. He knew the forms, and he wrote out a new will—his last will, to be opened only at his wife's death. There was another document drawn up that day settling the matter of Lady Farway's succession to the property, and Mr. Fairlie's administration of it—that is public knowledge, and I am not violating my trust in admitting it. But the new will, Mr. Pons, was not read by me. It was not read by

Mr. Fairlie. It was certainly not read by my clerk. For when he finished writing it out, Sir Charles folded the page to the place left for signature, and we all signed it without seeing a line of it. We could testify that it was his last will and testament on his word that it was, and on seeing him indite it."

Pons's eyes danced. "A page, Mr Abercrombie?" he asked. "A single page?"

The lawyer nodded. "Legal size, of course."

"You did, however, see previous wills?"

"Yes, of course."

"They have been destroyed?"

"Yes, Mr. Pons - at Sir Charles's direction. That day."

"And none of them but one page in length, I daresay?"

"Indeed not."

"Sir Charles had not indicated at any time immediately prior to making his last will that he contemplated such a change?"

"He had not."

"A man of impulse?"

"On the contrary." Judging that Pons had now finished, he added, "I am sorry I am not able to help you, Mr. Pons."

"Ah, you have already helped me, Mr. Abercrombie," returned Pons. "It is possible that you may be able to add something more."

Mr Abercrombie's relief faded from his face, which became more dour than ever.

"Since Sir Charles's earlier wills were destroyed, there can hardly be any point in keeping their contents secret," Pons went on. "Can you outline for us briefly the distribution of the estate as set forth in the second last will Sir Charles signed and subsequently destroyed?"

"I fear, sir, that would be unethical, highly unethical."

"Let me then hazard a guess. I submit that Sir Charles left his estate to be divided among his nieces and nephews with Mr. Gerald Farway in control of the business." Pons smiled. "You need say nothing, Mr. Abercrombie. I see by the expression on your face that I have hit it. It would have surprised me were it not so. But now let us look a little further. Can you conceive of the direction his last will might have taken?"

"I have tried to think. I cannot do so."

"Was it your impression that Mr. Fairlie knew what changes Sir Charles made?"

"It would surprise me if he did not."

"So that, Mr. Abercrombie, no one alive now knows what is in the will. I trust, sir, you have it in perfect safekeeping."

"Bless my soul!" cried Mr. Abercrombie, startled from his dour reserve. "You are surely not suggesting that some attempt to destroy it might be made?"

"Since no one save your clerk and yourself knows about its existence, I should not think that likely," said Pons dryly.

Mr. Abercrombie swallowed, hard. "Mr. Devins my clerk at that time was killed in a motor accident at Devizes a year ago."

"Ah," said Pons. "Then only you remain to testify to the authenticity of that will, Mr. Abercrombie."

The lawyer lost a little colour. His face became very grave, his mouth drew down. "You put matters strangely, Mr. Pons," he said.

"I assure you, I have no intention of doing so. But there is matter for some thought here. It does not hang together clearly to the eye, Mr. Abercrombie, I put it to you. What do you suppose put Sir Charles in such a flurry and agitation as to make him change his will?" He did not wait upon the lawyer's reply, but pressed on. "Did he do anything more on that day? Or do you not wish to say?"

"I will speak of it; it is no secret," said Mr. Abercrombie in some haste. "He increased the stipend paid Mr. Robert—to hasten his study of medicine. He settled a small sum on Mr. Fairlie's daughter—to be paid immediately; and it was paid. He arranged for a sum to be paid into the account of his niece, Jill, in Paris."

Pons waited upon more to come, but there was no more.

"Did he make any explanation of all this?"

"It was not Sir Charles's habit to do so."

"Did he say nothing at all? I put it to you, Mr. Abercrombie—surely he could not be so secretive with his lawyer."

"He could. He was. He said nothing, nothing . . . but . . ." Mr. Abercrombie slowed to a pause.

"Out with it, Mr. Abercrombie. Let us not forget that we are inquiring into a murder."

"Why, he did say something—no more than muttered it—I discounted it. He was distraught."

"Yes, yes. But what was it?"

"Let me see. 'Injustice compounds injustice.' That was it. Just that." He shook his head. "A fairer man never existed. Oh, he was conservative, now and then a trifle self-righteous—but fair, Mr. Pons, very fair. I did not understand his talk of injustice."

"We make progress," said Pons. "How was he unjust to Jill, for example?"

"He disliked her inclination to an artist's life."

"And to Miss Fairlie?"

Abercrombie grimaced. "Young Farway and the girl were in love. They planned to be married. But Sir Charles broke it up, and the boy went to Scotland - was sent, I assumed - for the shooting."

"And died in an accident."

"Yes."

"And to Robert?"

"Well, this was a matter of impatience. Robert chose to go into law - and, well into his studies, changed to medicine. It kept him at medical college all at the expense of Sir Charles. I suppose he felt that his niggardliness with money for Robert was unjust."

The telephone rang suddenly.

Abercrombie turned to it and spoke. The sound that came back at him was certainly Sir Hugh Parrington's booming voice. Abercrombie held the telephone toward Pons. "For you, sir."

"Thank you." Pons took it, identified himself with "Pons here," and stood listening.

When he put down the telephone, he turned again to Abercrombie.

"Can you tell us how much Sir Charles settled on Miss Fairlie?"

"I rather think that is not within my province to do, Mr. Pons," said the lawyer.

"I will not press it, sir. A 'small sum' is ambiguous and relative."

Abercrombie made a silencing gesture with his right hand. "Let us say that it was a small sum for Sir Charles."

"Good enough," said Pons. "Do you also serve the business as lawyer, Mr. Abercrombie?"

"Indeed I do."

"Is there or has there been recently any cause for concern about the financial status of the business?"

"None. I may say that it is flourishing. Farway Printers, Ltd. has all the business it can handle."

"Thank you, Mr. Abercrombie. I think that is all."

The lawyer was plainly relieved. "I'm sorry I couldn't be of more assistance. Fairlie's death is a dreadful thing. But in our profession a certain reticence is not only essential but mandatory."

Outside once again, Pons lost no time striding away toward the George. "Sir Hugh is waiting there for us," he explained. "We have

been invited to luncheon at Farway Hall. Evidently two other members of the family have made an appearance, and Lady Farway made the decision to have them meet us."

The Chief Constable was walking up and down in front of the George when we came within sight of the hotel. His limousine was parked at the kerb. Marking our approach, he strode out into the street to meet us.

"An impatient man," observed Pons.

"I have seen you fully as impatient," I said.

"If you're ready, we'll go right over," boomed Sir Hugh, coming up. "The newspapers' reports of the murder have had results. Jill flew over from Paris, and Robert has come down from Scotland. They are rare visitors, and Lady Farway wanted you to meet them."

"We'll go directly," said Pons.

Once in the car, the Chief Constable asked, "Did you get anything out of Abercrombie?"

"Let us just say that I was not disappointed."

"Ah, you found him unwilling to talk."

"Reticent."

"I told you so."

"I learned a few trifles," Pons went on. "For example, no one thought to tell me that Mr. Fairlie's daughter and young Farway intended to marry."

"Fact. They were engaged. Charlie was sticky about it. Can't understand why. Diana was a very fine girl. A looker, too. Maybe Charlie thought that was it. Anyway, he succeeded in breaking it up. . . ."

"The engagement was broken?" put in Pons.

Sir Hugh shook his head. "No—just abated, you might say. They got him to go away for a while. Scotland. And, of course, then there was the accident. Diana was at the services. Right after that she gave up her position—she worked as a secretary at Farway Printers office, as you might guess, and went to Cheltenham to live. She was too bitter to stay here. Can't say I blame her."

"Did Sir Charles regret his interference?"

"Hum! If he did, he wouldn't admit it. She did, though—she felt very strongly about it. For a while there was a rift between them. But that was healed, of course. She's a sensible woman, make no mistake about that—and perhaps stronger than they think."

"I am curious to know how often Miss Fairlie visited her father."

"Odd you should ask. Diana's not come back to Frome since she

left. He did the visiting, not she. Nothing was ever said about it. Of course, Fairlie wouldn't say anything anyway. But I took it, it was she wouldn't come back. I don't doubt we'll see her tomorrow, though, at the inquest."

"I take it she resented Sir Charles's interference very much."

"She did. She did, indeed! Not so much the interference, I believe, as their sending him away. You know how women reason, Pons. If they hadn't sent him off to think things over, he'd be alive today, they'd have been married, and all that."

"She never married?"

The Chief Constable paused reflectively. "Come to think of it, I don't know. I don't believe she did. But we can learn that tomorrow, if it's important. She's likely to be here all day—the inquest's tomorrow afternoon, and the funeral next morning. Private services."

A baffling expression shone in Pons's eyes before he closed them and sat back, saying nothing more.

We reached the Hall within minutes.

Lady Farway, clad in deep purple, had come downstairs. She dominated the living-room into which we were shown. The entire Farway family appeared to be there—Gerald, Rebecca, and the two we had not yet met and to whom we were now introduced—Jill, a dark-skinned girl whose wild black hair cascaded over her shoulders, and Robert, a moustached young man who constantly hovered about his aunt, as if he meant to protect her even against his cousins and sister. The girl, Jill, had a high colour and an easy manner that was in direct contrast to Robert's formality.

"I know you are busy, Sir Hugh," said Lady Farway. "We shall go in to lunch at once."

"Ha! Must take time to eat," said the Chief Constable. "No hurry."

But Robert was already helping Lady Farway to her feet. Leaning heavily on his arm, she led the way into the dining-room across the hall—a pleasant, sunny room with a faint glow of green in it from the sunshot ivy leaves across the windows.

It was Jill who introduced the subject which had brought them to Farway Hall. "Have you found who did this terrible murder?" she asked Sir Hugh.

"We don't know yet," he answered. "But we will."

"I suppose, as the police always say, you have some promising leads." She laughed.

"We've asked Mr. Pons to look into the matter," continued Sir Hugh. "We can do the routine work. He will look beyond that."

"I don't have much faith in the police," said Jill frankly.

"Nor in any other institution," said Robert coldly.

She threw up her hands in a carefree manner. "Poor Mr. Fairlie! He couldn't have lived much longer anyway. Is it really true—that he was murdered?"

"No doubt of it," said the Chief Constable.

Lady Farway bit her lip. Robert's colour rose.

Now Jill turned directly toward Pons. "I do believe I've read about your assisting the police now and then," she said. "And producing those startling solutions or amazing deductions or whatever they are. I suppose you've uncovered all kinds of things already."

"Some few matters have come to my attention," said Pons, smiling.

"Such as, for instance?"

"Such as why Mr. Fairlie was killed," replied Pons.

"Hear! Hear!" cried Sir Hugh approvingly.

"I think we'd all like to know that," said Gerald, speaking for the first time.

"Mr. Fairlie was killed because he had discovered something that would gravely affect every member of this family," said Pons. "He was killed to prevent his disclosure of that discovery."

For a few moments after Pons's announcement not a sound was to be heard. Then the clink of glasses and utensils resumed.

Once again, it was Gerald who spoke. His plainly apprehensive gaze was fixed on Pons. "And do you know what that discovery was, Mr. Pons?"

"Not yet. I am beginning to see a certain pattern, however, and I fancy it will not be long before I learn Mr. Fairlie's secret."

Gerald's relief was almost impossible to miss.

Jill's wild laughter, completely uncontained, shattered the tension around the table. "Oh, that's the way all policemen talk!" she cried. "They do it in Paris as well as in England. At least half the time you never hear another thing!"

"True," said Pons with perfect equanimity. "But I am not the police."

"Mr. Pons has been at work for only a short time," said Lady Farway with the manifest intention of putting an end to Jill's baiting.

"I'm sure our lives are an open book," said Robert.

Once again Jill burst into laughter. "Mine's not," she said. "Is yours, Gerald? And how about you, Robert?"

"You've forgotten me," said Rebecca with cold disdain.

"Give me time," said Jill.

"Whatever must Mr. Pons think of us!" cried Lady Farway.

Pons only smiled, saying nothing.

"I should think," said Robert then with icy scorn, "on the few occasions on which we meet, we ought to show the most possible consideration to Aunt Ellen even if we cannot bring ourselves under control for the sake of our guests."

A hush fell on the room and was not broken until Pons turned to Jill and asked, "Do you come back to England very often?"

"Rather more often than I used to," she answered. "There are some interesting things being done in painting over here now. Stanley Spencer's *Resurrection*, for instance quite the most remarkable modern religious painting we have seen come out of England or out of the Continental countries, for that matter. And the work of Paul Nash continues to intrigue me, as well as some of the things Wyndham Lewis is doing I think especially of his portrait of Edith Sitwell. Though no one so far can touch Augustus John."

"Oh, watch Sutherland and Bacon," said Rebecca. "Sutherland has a most marvelous fantastic landscape called *Entrance to a Lane*."

"We seem to have another budding artist in the family," said Robert to his sister.

"Not really," she answered. "I like to keep up with things."

"They *are* most promising," agreed Jill.

Now the conversation became innocuous and more animated, and presently the initial impression I had of a family taut with inner tensions faded before one more favourable of an interesting group of people whose concerns were not by any means limited to the printing business. Indeed, only once was the business mentioned at all when Robert asked Gerald about it, and Gerald mentioned a very large printing that had to be done for one of the oldest and most respected British publishers.

After her one enthusiastic comment about young British painters, Rebecca fell silent; she sat dark and brooding over her food. Nor did Lady Farway take any significant part, though she was alert and remained interested. Pons, I saw, contented himself for the

most part with a minimum of talk, preferring instead to observe the members of the Farway family, while Sir Hugh entered almost boisterously into the talk, obviously at home among friends. They talked of many things—of the success of the recent Cheese Show and the quality of the cheeses—of Virginia Woolf's novel, *The Years*, and an announced omnibus edition of Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage*—of Dorset and Thomas Hardy—of new plays in London—of everything, in fact, except the late Jonas Fairlie.

I followed Pons's gaze as much as possible, without being obtrusive. Clearly he was studying one after another of the Farways: his eyes ranged from Gerald, who seemed to have a tendency toward pomposity, to Robert, who was more reserved and in his dress looked a little more the dandy, for he wore a handsome scarf around his neck, loosely knotted at his throat, instead of the conventional collar and tie, and his clothes, though plain, were expensive and tailored. Jill's every attitude, every word, every gesture bespoke her independence and the freedom she had sought, while Rebecca's air was far more that of a domestic than of a member of the family, as if she were aware that her role of companion to Lady Farway was far less exciting and offered fewer opportunities for an appreciation of the world and life outside Frome than did the roles of her cousins—Jill in Paris, painting—Gerald occupied with the affairs of Farway Printers, Ltd., and frequently off to London—Robert, completing his studies during his houseman duties in Edinburgh. Yet no hint of resentment could be seen either in her manner or in her words; she was withdrawn but self-assured; indeed, self-assurance seemed to be a distinctive family trait.

The luncheon came to an end. Lady Farway excused herself and retired to her quarters, Rebecca at her side. Gerald in turn left for his office. Jill and Robert were left, and it was immediately apparent that Robert had something to say and meant to say it, for as soon as his aunt was out of earshot, he bore down on Sir Hugh.

"I hope, sir, that you are aware of the delicate condition of Aunt Ellen's health, and that you are not harassing her."

The Chief Constable was somewhat taken aback. "We are not in the habit of harassing people—certainly not ladies."

"I mean no offense," said Robert.

"Of course he does," said Jill, laughing.

Robert flashed her a glance of irritation, but went on. "It's only that I am professionally aware of her condition."

"Harrumph!" boomed Sir Hugh. "Lady Farway has weathered many a storm. Doctor. And I suspect she'll live to weather more. I've known a good many of these frail, ailing women - and I never knew a one who didn't last a good long time."

"With care," agreed Robert.

"Of course, it's good care. They take care of themselves. And everyone around them helps." He chuckled. "But you needn't worry, my boy - we've visited Lady Farway only the once - apart from today - and we don't intend to trouble her unless we must. We've put the servants through it. There's little more we can do."

"Thank you, sir. I'm much relieved. I expect to take the night train back and I can do so easier in mind."

"Can't you wait until morning?" asked Jill. "I could give you a lift. I rented that little runabout in London and drove down."

"No thanks, Jill. I know how you drive," said Robert.

"I don't suppose there's anything either of you wants to say about Fairlie," said the Chief Constable.

"I haven't been in his world for a long time," said Jill, tossing her heavy hair back. "And he was never in mine."

"Did you know his daughter?" asked Pons quietly.

Jill looked at him cautiously. "Yes. Yes, I did."

"A strong minded girl," said Robert. "And a beauty."

"Beauty is in the eye of the beholder," said Jill airily.

"We'll be on our way," said Sir Hugh, glancing at Pons to see whether he had any objection.

Pons gave no sign.

Once again in the Chief Constable's limousine, Pons said reflectively, "The family is tense with matters to be kept hidden."

Sir Hugh laughed immoderately. "It's all perspective, Pons. It's all in how you look at it. Old families like these are strong on keeping scandal under cover - and they do, they do."

"Such as, for example?"

Sir Hugh shrugged. "Well, take that affair of Ronald's. You'd have to drag it out of them, word for word. But the fact is he was drowned off the coast of Wales - the Merioneth coast, when he was on a holiday. But it was whom he was off with that made the scandal. Gerald's girl - that's who. Everybody thought it was all settled between Harriet and Gerald - and she ran off to spend a week with Ronald at old Fairlie's place in Wales." He chuckled. "Seems to me they were more upset by that than at Ronald's death."

So you see it's a matter of values. They look at these things from a different perspective."

"Tell us more of this."

"Little more to tell. Ronald was fond of night swimming and there was a moon that night. He went in. She didn't. He never came back. It was a long time before the body was found - and then it was only by a chain around his neck they identified what was left of him."

Pons listened with manifest interest. When Sir Hugh had finished, he continued to sit in an attitude of deep thought, until the Chief Constable could tolerate his silence no longer.

"What d'you make of that, eh, Pons?"

"A pattern is beginning to emerge," said Pons.

The limousine drew up before the George.

"One thing more," said Pons. "You mentioned your men examining the servants at Farway Hall. The entrances, too, I assume."

"They went over everything. I'm afraid we can't satisfy what you'll want to know. There wasn't a shred of evidence of any tampering with the doors or windows anywhere. We didn't leave a single opening we failed to examine. Even to the chimneys!"

Pons smiled. "Were there any windows open?"

"One in Lady Farway's room - another in Miss Rebecca's. Neither wide enough to permit passage of so much as a hand."

"That leaves us with a door left unlocked. Or a key."

"Well, no one could be certain that all the doors were locked but everyone believes they were. Rebecca was outside last; she thinks she 'may' have left a door unlocked. After all, it was still before midnight, and the house wasn't generally locked up until the last of them went to bed." He shrugged. "Moreover, as I'm sure you know, a good many houses just don't lock up tight."

"The fact remains that whoever searched Mr. Fairlie's room knew precisely how to get to it, and how to slip away without being seen. That suggests a member of the household."

"I'm not so sure of that. Fairlie had his cronies, too. He came and went as he pleased. We don't know who he might have had up there."

"We have so far heard nothing of his friends," observed Pons. "It has been all family, all business."

"We can get on to that," said Sir Hugh.

"I doubt it would add much to this inquiry," replied Pons dryly. "But one can never tell to whom Mr Fairlie may have confided something."

"Right!" cried the Chief Constable enthusiastically. He leaned forward to open the door for us. "I'll see you in the morning."

Back in our quarters in the George, I turned on Pons.

"How could you tell them over at Farway Hall—and so positively—that Fairlie had been killed to prevent his disclosing a discovery he had made about the family?"

"Why, because it is true. It is elementary, my dear fellow. Anything that concerned him would have been handled by him. But something that concerned the family—something unpleasant—put the wind up him. He couldn't bring himself to act. Perhaps he had reached an impasse—a paralysis of action or a point beyond which he feared to go because of whatever else he might find out."

"You did not speak then simply to stir them up?"

"That is a method dear to certain current writers of detective fiction," he said impatiently.

"Come, come," I said, "nothing is beyond you when the interests of justice are to be served."

"I meant it, I assure you. I can say that I am reasonably certain what one of Mr. Fairlie's secrets was."

"One?"

"Yes, yes—there were two, of course. Their relationship was but peripheral. It is the second that is of greater concern to me now. I am finding my way to the identity of Fairlie's murderer, and I already suspect very strongly the nature of the discovery he made and which he was ready to disclose at last—and, unless I am very much mistaken, to me."

"You cannot mean it!" I cried.

"I was never more serious."

"Why, I am completely bewildered. This case has offered us, surely, nothing at all in the way of tangible fact—save that of murder. It is quite one thing to have a problem laid before you—but another indeed to try to learn the problem without help."

"Is it not!" cried Pons, delightedly.

"I find it baffling."

"Come, come, say not so, Parker. I fancy there have been too many attractive young women about. You have always had an eye for the ladies, and you are not thinking through."

"My wife would not like to hear that."

"I am not so sure of that. It has been my experience —"

"Limited!" I cried. "Very limited!"

"— that ladies have a preference for men who take pleasure in their sex. It reassures them, for after all, as in this case, it is the wife who has been chosen — not the other ladies." He sprang to his feet. "And now, if you will excuse me, I have a few routine matters to look into."

V. AN ATTEMPT AT MURDER

A pounding on the door of our quarters at midnight brought Pons out of bed in a bound. He paused only long enough to make sure I was awake and to say, "Come, Parker, the game's afoot!" Then he crossed the room with cat-like rapidity and threw open the door as I turned on the light.

The Chief Constable stood there, obviously in a state of excitement.

"Can you come at once, Pons?" he cried. "There's been an attempt at another murder — and again on the London train!"

"Come in," urged Pons, taking hold of Sir Hugh's arm and drawing him into the room. "You'll have everyone on this floor awake."

"He fought him off — got nothing more than a few scratches. But he's shaken up — badly."

"Which one of them?" asked Pons. "It would have to be one of the Farways."

"It was Robert." He paused, then asked, "But how did you know it had to be one of them?"

"It is their riddle," said Pons impatiently. "How was it done?"

"In the same pattern as the murder of old Fairlie," said the Chief Constable. "Chloroform — a tottering, bearded old man. But you'll want to talk to Robert. We have him over at the station."

The Chief Constable continued to talk while we dressed. The attack, he said, had taken place beyond Westbury. Robert Farway had managed to fight off his attacker and had reported the attack as soon as he had collected himself. The train, however, had not been stopped. Robert had got off at Edington and been returned to Frome by a local officer.

The police station was not far down Bath Street on Christchurch Street West. A considerably subdued Robert Farway waited there. His clothes were disheveled, though he had obviously made some attempt to put them right. There were scratches on his face and a gouging scratch on his neck. The scarf he had worn knotted at his throat was torn. There was still an almost nauseatingly strong odour of chloroform about him, and, indeed, he seemed not insensible of it, for he was anything but alert.

"I rather think I have done the police an injustice," said Robert at once. "I had not really thought. . . ."

Sir Hugh cut him off. "Don't tire yourself with regrets, my boy. Just tell us what happened."

Robert looked at him reproachfully. "You have already taken it all down, sir."

"Yes, yes, but Mr. Pons will want to hear you tell it."

Robert transferred his reproach to Pons.

"Perhaps you would prefer me to ask questions, Mr. Farway," said Pons.

"Indeed, I would."

"Sir Hugh has outlined your story. We are not clear as to where your attacker entered the train."

"Nor am I, Mr. Pons. He could have got on at Frome or at Westbury. He could have got on looking very much different. He entered my compartment just out of Westbury perhaps because another passenger shared my compartment to Westbury. He came in from the corridor."

"You say he might have looked 'much different.' "

"Mr. Pons," said Robert impatiently, "no one as strong as he was could possibly have been as old as he looked. I tried to tear the beard off his face, but I was fighting for my life, holding my breath to keep from inhaling the chloroform. I couldn't do it. But he was young and strong. Fortunately, I've always kept up my exercises - and he had just so much time. He finally gave up and retreated to the corridor. I was too shaken - and, I confess, too weak, to pursue. I had all I could do to throw up the window and take fresh air."

"You say 'he' with such confidence, Mr. Farway," said Pons. "You are positive it couldn't have been a woman?"

Farway looked startled. "Oh, I should hardly think so. Still - but it would have to be a very strong and masculine woman."

"There are such, my boy," put in Sir Hugh.



"He came in and attacked at once?" asked Pons.

"Yes, but I was on my guard."

"Why?"

"Because, a moment or two before he came at me, I detected the odour of chloroform. In a sense, I was ready for him."

"Just how did he attack, Mr. Farway?"

"He took me by the hair with his right hand, bending my head back, and tried to clap a chloroform-soaked pad over my face. I was able to turn my face just enough to avoid it — my scalp still hurts, and there is some skin burn — as you can see — along the jaw and neck where the pad made contact. I fought back at once."

"You were clearly the stronger," put in Sir Hugh.

"I believe so. Still, the surprise of the attack, sir — and the effect of what little chloroform I inhaled, combined to put me off balance. He did recognize, however, that he could not achieve his goal, whatever that was."

"Any idea who might want to kill you, my boy?" asked the Chief Constable.

"None."

"Like the case of Jonas Fairlie, you might know something dangerous to someone," ventured Sir Hugh.

"I could not imagine what it might be," said Farway. "I can't believe it."

"Or you might have something he wanted."

"Whatever could that be?" Farway scoffed. "He could hardly cash a cheque from Aunt Ellen."

"Mr. Fairlie's money was untouched," observed Pons quietly. "Nothing of obvious value was removed from his person. Indeed, we are inclined to think that nothing whatever was taken from him, that his killer, failing to find what he sought, left the train and went directly to Farway Hall to search Mr. Fairlie's quarters."

"You should know, Robert," added the Chief Constable, "we have every reason to believe the same man who killed Jonas Fairlie made the attempt on you tonight. A man, that is, wearing a long coat, a false beard, and looking like a very old man — tottering — with a cane."

"I saw no cane," said Robert.

"Such a man got on to the train at Frome the night Fairlie was murdered," Sir Hugh went on. "We've eliminated everyone else."

"Let us say rather we have *tentatively* eliminated everyone else."

put in Pons "There were on that train some unidentified passengers—including a woman."

"I don't know, Pons," said Sir Hugh gruffly. "I don't see this as a woman's crime."

"Women have committed crimes far worse," said Pons. He turned to Farway once more. "Of course there was no secret about your leaving for London on the last train."

"None, Mr. Pons." He gazed toward Sir Hugh. "I don't suppose there is any reason for my staying now, is there? I'd like to take the next train."

"By all means," said the Chief Constable. "But why not ride in with Jill when she goes?"

Farway smiled weakly. "I've ridden with her before. I'd rather not do so again."

Sir Hugh guffawed. "I've seen her driving by! But we may send for you to make an identification if you can."

"I will come at once."

Sir Hugh turned to a police sergeant standing in the background. "We'll get in touch with the police along the line and have a search made for the place that fellow left the train."

"While they're about it," put in Pons, "have them keep an eye open for a discarded coat and beard—and perhaps an old hat." He turned to Farway. "He did wear a hat, Mr. Farway?"

"Yes, sir. A rather beaten-up hat—of felt, I believe."

"Colour?" barked Sir Hugh.

"Brown."

"And the coat?"

"Very light brown. The hat was darker in colour. And the beard was a kind of iron grey." He turned to Pons. "You think then he may have simply discarded these things and remained on the train?"

"I think it eminently possible, even probable," said Pons.

"What more can I tell you?" asked Farway in the brief silence that fell.

"Only such details of description as you have not yet mentioned," answered Pons. "Was he tall—short—of medium height?"

"Not six feet. Probably five ten."

"And his hands?"

"Oh, Mr. Pons, he wore gloves."

"Of course. So did Mr. Fairlie's killer. The colour of his eyes?"

"I'm not sure. But I believe they were blue."

"His hair?"

Farway shook his head. "I saw nothing but his beard. His cheeks, though, I remember had a high colour. I suppose, Doctor," he added, turning to me, "one becomes accustomed to making such impressions the longer one is in practise."

"Indeed, one does," I replied.

"Go on, Mr. Farway," said Pons.

"Well, sir," Farway continued, "if I had to say, I'd guess that he was accustomed to rough work—his whole manner was rough."

"That may have been assumed."

"But he was quick, very quick."

"He had to be. He had very little time."

"He seems to have taken a great chance—and I cannot think what his reason might have been."

"We shall hope to disclose it in time," said Pons.

Farway looked at him with frank doubt in his grey-blue eyes, his forehead slightly wrinkled by his raised eyebrows. Then his gaze swung away, back to the Chief Constable.

"I put myself in your hands, Sir Hugh. But I must get back to Edinburgh as soon as I may."

Sir Hugh glanced toward Pons as if he expected Pons to say him aye or nay. Pons, however, made no sign.

"Very well, my boy," said the Chief Constable. "We may send for you for purposes of identification, as I said before. But that's all for now. If you like, I'll send you to London by car."

"I would appreciate that very much, sir."

The Chief Constable walked out of the station with us and stood in the glow of the lights at the doorway to talk. "What do you make of this, Pons?" he asked.

"One factor, I daresay, is immediately apparent," said Pons. "We've rattled the killer."

"Why do you say so?"

"He has just made a bad mistake."

"How?"

"My dear fellow, he has given his game away," replied Pons. "He may wish to show his contempt for our poor efforts, but he has chosen a poor way in which to do so. He insults us."

"By Gad, Pons! He almost got away with it. If Robert hadn't been as strong as he is, he'd have done him in."

"One or two little points occur to me," Pons went on. "The chloroform, for a beginning."

"I expect to have a report on that in the morning."

"Capital! Then I should lose no time getting on to a search of the line. That fellow can have little more use for his disguise and I should think it most likely that he discarded it, resumed his real identity, and calmly remained on the train. We'll want those things before some rustic appropriates them."

"We'll get right on to it, never fear – the moment light breaks."

We bade him good-night and walked away, Pons preferring not to ride. The night was dark, the sky having clouded over, and at this hour no one was abroad.

"I must say, Pons, I failed to follow you," I said.

"Ah, that is not unusual at this stage," returned Pons. "Tell me, did you have opportunity to look at the scratches and bruises Robert sustained?"

"I saw them, yes."

"They suggested nothing to you?"

"Nothing but that young Farway appears to have acquitted himself well against a brute of a fellow who meant to take his life as he did that of Jonas Fairlie."

Pons clucked.

"And what can you have meant by saying the murderer had given his game away?"

"Ah, that is elementary. You need only ask yourself why this attempt had to be made at this point."

"Why was Fairlie murdered?" I countered. "There is clearly a relationship between them."

"There is indeed," said Pons grimly.

"I incline to the theory that Robert must know something however unwitting he may be that jeopardizes the murderer," I said boldly.

"You could not be more correct," agreed Pons. "I wish you knew what it is, since Robert is positive he does not."

"We are bound to learn it," I said, "with you on the scent."

"I appreciate your confidence in my slight powers," said Pons, chuckling. "But now let us move a little faster – I smell rain on the wind."

Back at our quarters at the George, I went to bed again immediately. Pons, however, spent some time pacing the floor, his

hands clasped behind his back. For a while the vile smell of the abominable shag he smoked kept me awake, and I saw him pause and look again at the notes he had copied from the pad in Jonas Fairlie's rooms, staring at and pondering the initials written there.

I was not therefore surprised when he proposed at breakfast next morning that we pay a call on the poor cousins of the Farways. Rain had fallen in the early hours, but it had now halted, though clouds still held to the sky. Nevertheless, the air was stimulating—fresh and rainwashed, and the wind that rode in out of the north bore the fragrance of the meadows.

Our course by Pons's preference again on foot took us past some of the loveliest old houses in Somerset, some of them quaint with age, as well as three churches and a school, before we neared the edge of the town in Dyer's Close Lane, off which presently we found the property on which the two Hattrays lived with their cousin, Gareth Ainslie.

The house was of stone, and old. The outbuildings some distance from it clearly suggested that the place had at one time been the home of a sheep farmer who had certainly contributed to the woolen industry at Frome; but a considerable number of years ago Frome had begun to push out toward the farm, and though the buildings were still kept up, and a few sheep could be seen off in pasture, it was evident that no appreciable farming was now being carried on. A copse of beeches that rose just beyond the outbuildings lent the scene a harmonious balance.

As we came in through the gate in the blackthorn hedge that separated the property from the lane, the heavy door of the house opened and I recognized the burly form of Russell Hattray standing on the threshold. He had evidently observed our approach and had not chosen to wait upon our knock.

"Good-morning," he said gruffly.

His gaze was fixed on Pons, however, and as soon as Pons had returned his greeting, he said, "What can we do for you, Mr. Solar Pons?"

"Answer a few questions," said Pons.

"Come in."

He turned abruptly, leaving me to close the door, and led the way to a sitting-room. There sat a woman—one of medium height, almost as burly and strong-looking as her brother, as dark as he and a tall, almost slender man whose left eyelid drooped halfway

down over his eye, giving him a sinister appearance. These two were Jennifer Hatray and Gareth Ainslie; though he did so, Russell Hatray need not have introduced them.

And, having done so, Hatray turned on Pons. "We know you're here to look into Jonas Fairlie's death. Parrington called you in. Can't keep these little matters secret. I saw you with him at the Somerset."

"You knew Mr. Fairlie?" asked Pons.

"Aye."

"How well?"

"Say on sight. Hardly more. We have some investments in Farway Printers - and Fairlie made it his business to know all the investors - that is, all the local ones. So we knew him."

"He was forever prying around," said Ainslie, with some resentment.

"Trying to buy up our stock," put in Miss Jennifer Hatray. "We weren't selling."

Russell Hatray flashed each of them a warning glance. They subsided, looking away.

"I take it the stock paid decent dividends," said Pons.

"Aye," said Hatray.

"Fairlie owned some of it himself," Pons went on.

Hatray made an impatient gesture. "If it comes to it, we don't know any more about Fairlie than most everyone else around here. No need asking us. He worked for them - Farways."

"Your cousins."

"Aye. Distant."

"And kept their distance, too," put in Miss Jennifer Hatray with a bitter smile.

"As we liked it," added Ainslie.

"We're not a friendly family, as you see," said Russell Hatray then. "Mind our own affairs. Expect others to mind theirs. They always did. And we try to do the same."

There was plainly not much to be discovered here - or not much any of them intended to say. They sat like self enclosed statues, walled in by suspicion and distrust. Yet there was that about them that suggested they had anticipated Pons's coming around to see them, and it was not entirely consistent with their affected indifference. Mr. Fairlie dead, they implied, meant no more to them than Mr. Fairlie living. Plainly, he belonged to "that lot" - that is,

their cousins, and his death affected them not at all. They waited upon Pons's every word.

"So you had no social contact with your cousins?" said Pons.

"None," said Hattray roughly.

"For how long?"

"Ever since . . .," began Jennifer, and quailed before her brother's swift, dark look.

"Go on, Miss Hattray," urged Pons.

Hattray took a deep breath and growled. "Seven years," he said. "That's what you want to know, is it?"

"Let us hear about it, Mr. Hattray," said Pons with an air of already having heard about it and now wanting only Hattray's version.

"You'll have been told, then," said Hattray. "I don't see it has aught to do with old Fairlie's death. Charlie's boy used to meet his girl here now and then—that was it."

"Miss Diana Fairlie."

"Aye." A brusque nod of his dark head. "Charlie carried on about the two of them seeing each other. They met here. When Charlie found it out—why, that was the end of it."

"And the end of what you call 'social contact,' " said Ainslie. "He stood between them. Sent the boy to Scotland for the shooting. He never came back. You'll know all that."

"Nothing to do with Fairlie's death," repeated Hattray stubbornly.

"We never know what has to do with murder, Mr. Hattray," said Pons, "until we have examined into it as thoroughly as possible."

"What's *he* think asking you to come down here to look into it?" asked Hattray then, belligerently. "Our local police could handle it."

"We are working together," said Pons. "There was good reason, which you may not know."

Hattray gazed at us with even deeper suspicion.

"So that," Pons went on, as if Hattray had not broken into his train of thought. "Sir Charles cut off all contact as a result of learning that his son had met Miss Diana here?"

"Aye." He shrugged. "And the others never did come here. Not that Charlie came very much. It was just that our relations were more amiable. We liked that boy. A fine lad. He'd have been a credit to the business, too. But in view of what happened, there was

a lot of bitterness. Charlie blamed himself – and well he might – for the boy's death. And Fairlie was more on his side than his own daughter's if it comes to that. Sent her off to live elsewhere."

"But not until after the boy's death."

"True. But as she was the living reminder of what had brought it all about, she had to go where Charlie and his wife wouldn't chance to see her. Everything was done for *them*."

"When did you last see Jonas Fairlie?" asked Pons.

Hattray had the answer to that sudden question in a flash. "The day after Charlie was buried."

"He came here."

"Aye. We didn't attend the services. If we had he might have spared himself coming here and talked to us in the cemetery. Tried to buy our stock in Farway Printers."

"For himself?"

"He didn't say."

"Well, thank you all," said Pons. "I think there is nothing more I wish to know—at this time."

Relief showed all around, and a little thawing. Whatever they had expected Pons to probe into, he had not done so. Russell Hattray walked us to the gate, explaining in answer to a casual inquiry from Pons that at one time sheep in great numbers had been raised here "Before my time!" and supplied to local markets, for Frome had always been agricultural, a notable market town, and the centre of a great woolen industry "Not that it was once, but still important to the town." but the three of them were now more or less retired, and living on a fixed income "comfortable." He shook hands with Pons at the gate and stood watching us walk away, his hands stuck into his waist.

"We have surely learned little from them," I said when we were well away.

"I should not be inclined to dismiss our visit as fruitless," said Pons "There is something of value even in the negative."

"That fellow Hattray must have the strength of a bull," I said.

"I daresay he has."

"Were they not waiting for us?"

"I rather believe they were. We were seen approaching, and they were called together."

"To prevent your questioning them separately," I cried.

"Perhaps," said Pons tranquilly. "These people are plainly

aggrieved at what they fancy is their slighting treatment by their cousins. At the same time they do not wish to say anything that might be carried back to their cousins and be taken amiss."

It was evident that Pons was not inclined to talk. I fell silent. It was soon also manifest that Pons was not headed toward the George, for he turned off abruptly into Selwood Road, walking a little faster now, for the clouds were thickening and rain again impended.

"Where to?" I asked.

"There is still time to have a word with Mr. Bramshaw at the printing works," said Pons.

Farway Printers, Ltd. soon loomed ahead. It was an imposing, recently modernized building, divided into three wings, of which the central wing was devoted to offices for the management, while the works itself occupied the larger right wing, and storage was maintained in the other.

We were shown to the office of the manager with a minimum of delay, for Mr. Bramshaw was conferring with the head of the manufacturing department and one of the designers. He proved to be a rather austere man of middle age and middle height, though his pince-nez made him look somewhat more icily detached than he was in fact. He was conservatively dressed and wore a small rose in his lapel. His cold blue eyes looked at us with more than ordinary interest. He did not wait for Pons to begin a conversation, for, immediately upon our introducing ourselves, he opened with,

"I thought we should see you sooner or later. May I say how impressed I was to learn from friends in the Foreign Office about the splendid feat in which you were both engaged for our government on your recent journey from Prague?"

His reference to the adventure of the Orient Express, in which I played, all unwittingly, a significant part, took Pons briefly aback, for no public mention of the affair had been made.

"Thank you," said Pons.

"But you didn't come to hear that," said Bramshaw, with an affability his pinched features did not share. "Please make yourselves comfortable and tell me how we here can be of service to you. Anything we can do to help turn up the fellow who murdered Mr. Fairlie we will be eager to do."

"Mr. Fairlie had certain obligations which brought him to the works from time to time," said Pons.

"A fine, co-operative, conscientious man," said Bramshaw. "Indeed, he came in now and then. He was Sir Charles's liaison man. I am sure you know that."

Pons surprised him with a question at a tangent. "How long has Mr. Gerald Farway been employed here?"

It took Bramshaw a few moments to recover from his surprise. "I believe it is eight or nine years," he said.

"In April, this year," Pons continued. "Mr. Fairlie inquired about the absence of Gerald Farway from his desk during August of last year."

"Yes, Mr. Pons, he did."

"Did he say what impelled his inquiry?"

"No, he didn't."

"Had he ever done so previously?"

"No, Mr. Pons."

"Or subsequently?"

Again Bramshaw's reply was in the negative. The manager was now plainly at sea.

"Was Mr. Fairlie in the habit of checking up on the time employees of Farway Printers spent away from their desks?"

"Nothing of that sort, no."

"So his inquiry must have come as a surprise to you?"

"Yes, it did. I wanted to ask—but, you didn't ask Mr. Fairlie. He was a man who kept his own counsel. If I had asked, I'd have most likely been put off. He might have taken it wrong, too."

"You wrote him to say that Gerald Farway had been away from his desk for two days."

"Evidently you found my letter."

Pons nodded. "In consequence of that inquiry, can you say, was Gerald Farway reprimanded?"

"Not to my knowledge."

Pons sat for a few moments in contemplative silence. Then he changed the subject again.

"Two years ago, just before Sir Charles's death, he returned from a journey with Mr. Fairlie. Do you know where they went?"

"No, Mr. Pons."

"When they returned, both men appear to have been uncommonly busy. Among other occurrences several men were discharged. Can you relate these discharges in any way to that journey Sir Charles took with Mr. Fairlie?"

Bramshaw was now utterly bewildered. He sat shaking his head. "Oh, those discharges had been in the works, so to speak, for some time. I can see no connection between that odd journey Sir Charles took with Mr. Fairlie and the discharges that were ordered on their return. The men discharged had been failing in their obligations consistently over a period of time—at least a year, before they were actually discharged."

"Sir Charles's interest in the business was maintained by Mr. Fairlie, I take it."

"Oh, yes."

"So that actually these people were discharged on Mr. Fairlie's recommendation?"

"No, sir. On mine. Mr. Fairlie merely carried my recommendations to Sir Charles. Of course, Mr. Fairlie was the kind of man who needed to satisfy himself that the charges were true, and he did so."

"So he went about in the plant to see for himself?"

Bramshaw nodded. "He was the last person to want to see any injustice done," he explained. "He had a horror of doing any injustice to anyone himself. It was second nature to him."

"That is consistent with the portrait we have of him, Mr. Bramshaw."

"We said, some of us, that he was too honest for his own good. Worrying about details of no significance, particularly where it concerned the Farway family. He seemed to feel that he personally owed Sir Charles more than he could repay him."

"Can you conceive of anyone who might want Mr. Fairlie dead?"

"No, Mr. Pons—I cannot."

"Yet someone obviously did."

"It is beyond me, sir—utterly beyond me."

And this was the sum total of Pons's visit to Farway Printers, Ltd. When we walked away from the works, I could not keep from pointing out that we had drawn another blank.

"I am not disappointed," said Pons. "The negative may be as informative as the positive, as by this time you must know. Whatever Mr. Fairlie's secrets were they seem to have had little to do with the business except in the most peripheral way."

"Then why are you doing this routine police work?" I demanded. "For that's what it is."

Pons nodded amiably. "The police cannot do everything. They

are all too busy. But this is part of the process of eliminating the possible and establishing the probable. Now we shall see what the inquest holds."

VI. INQUEST

Dr. Henry Littlefield officiated at the inquest. He was a man of middle age, a native of Frome. His manner was proprietary. He had been coroner for a decade, explained Sir Hugh Parrington, who had joined us. He looked out at the public over his spectacles and seemed to be in no hurry to open the proceedings. Outside, the rain that had been threatening all morning was now falling, slowly and steadily, as if it meant to come down for hours, and the sound of dripping at the eaves and of running water filled the room.

Gerald Farway was present for the family, and Ralph Bramshaw was at his side. I observed that Pons looked from time to time toward a heavily veiled young woman, all in black, who sat alone and very still well away from anyone else and who, I concluded, must be Miss Diana Fairlie.

Once Alfred Aston, the guard, made his appearance, Dr. Littlefield opened the inquest. Evidently he had been waiting for him to come, for he now gave as much an appearance of haste as previously he had of leisureliness.

The guard told a straightforward story, with Dr. Littlefield putting in a judicious question now and then. He had known Jonas Fairlie for almost two decades. He had been a frequent traveler—not regular, no, but every little while or so. No, he could not be called more than a nodding acquaintance, but his habits were familiar to Aston, and he never slept on the train—not within Aston's experience. "So that when I saw him sitting there like that, so soon after he got on, I concluded something was wrong, and I stepped in and found him dead."

And how did Aston know he was dead? inquired the coroner.

"Why, he wasn't breathing," replied Aston, faintly indignant. "And there was all that smell of chloroform."

"How do you know that, Mr. Aston?"

"I know what it smells like," said the guard. "I've been in the hospital in Bath."

Since Aston showed some signs of becoming voluble, the coroner did not press the point. "Go on, Mr. Aston."

Aston set forth his actions on his discovery of Jonas Fairlie's body and presently finished. He was allowed to leave the witness-box and Dr. Lucas Everdene, the police doctor, followed.

The medical evidence was set forth succinctly. The smell of chloroform was still evident when the doctor arrived. There was no sign of the pad or cloth or whatever had been used to cover Fairlie's nose and mouth, but the typical reddening of the skin was plainly to be seen. The doctor, however, would not say that Fairlie had died from the effect of the chloroform or from fright or failure of his heart as a result of the attack.

"The attack on him, however, in your opinion, brought on his death?" asked Dr. Littlefield.

"No doubt of it."

"You carried out a post-mortem?"

"Of course. There was some heart damage. It appeared recent. The precise cause of death would be immaterial in this case," said Dr. Everdene. "He was an aging man, and the sudden attack killed him."

"If a man had chloroform clapped over his nose and mouth, how long would it take him to die, in your estimation?"

Dr. Everdene made a gesture of impatience. "Five minutes of chloroform would kill anyone in such circumstances," he said testily. "But the point is that Fairlie could have died in less time from shock. Just shutting off his oxygen for five minutes would kill him, in all likelihood."

Dr. Littlefield excused him.

Inspector Arthur Bates took his place and gave his evidence in a skilled, professional manner. He had been summoned from the station and in the absence of the Superintendent, he had gone to where the carriage had been shunted off the main line at Westbury. There had been some question about the scene of the crime, but Mr. Aston's evidence seemed to place it within the boundaries of Somerset rather than in Wiltshire. A hasty conference between the Chief Constables of the two counties had resulted in returning the body to Frome in the carriage in which the crime had taken place.

Dr. Littlefield bore down sharply on all the Inspector's evidence, picking and pecking at it with some deliberation. He seemed to think that Bates ought to offer more details about motive. How could he be certain nothing had been taken from the body? for instance.

"Not knowing what Mr. Fairlie carried with him, I couldn't say, sir," said Bates.

He was allowed to leave the witness-box presently, and a succession of witnesses followed—two police officials from Westbury, primarily to verify the meeting with the Chief Constable, Sir Hugh Parrington, and Nichols, the booking-clerk—but it was evident that if the police had anything in the way of formal evidence pointing in any specific direction, it was not being offered. In just short of two hours, the inquest was adjourned.

Pons had not shown much interest in the proceedings. He had kept his attention on Miss Fairlie and when he saw that she had risen and was about to make her way out of the room, he was on his feet and off to intercept her. He reached her side at the entrance.

"Miss Fairlie?" he asked. "I would like a word with you."

Without lifting her veil, she answered, "You have the advantage of me, sir. I don't know you."

She had a pleasant, well-modulated voice. After Pons had introduced us, she hesitated for a few moments, with people milling around her, then said, "Let us just sit down at the rear here," and led the way to the now-abandoned chairs at the back of the room.

There she sat down, careful to arrange herself so that her back was to the people still passing out of the room, and raised her veil. She was indeed a beautiful young woman. Not yet thirty, she had what country folk call a peaches-and-cream complexion, out of which looked hazel eyes rimmed with an edge of green; her hair was a lustrous chestnut, her lips were full and inviting.

"We are looking into your father's death, Miss Fairlie," explained Pons. "Perhaps you have something to tell us."

She shook her head, biting her lower lips. "I find it very hard to believe Father was—" she hesitated, as if it were difficult for her to say the word, "—murdered. I cannot imagine why. And such a desperate act, too!"

"Your father came to visit you frequently?"

"Yes, I suppose you would call it frequently. At least once a month, sometimes twice. There is no other family, Mr. Pons. My father had a younger brother, Howard—but Howard was a rascal, to hear my father tell it, and the two couldn't get along."

"Still alive?"

"Somewhere."

"Last heard from?"

"Australia, two years ago." She hesitated again, as if in doubt whether or not to speak. "He wrote Father for money. He wanted to come back to England. Father didn't send it."

"You don't seem to have come here to visit your father?" said Pons then. "Why?"

"There were good reasons for that, Mr. Pons," she said steadily. "The same reasons for which I left Frome. Even if there were not such reasons, I am employed half-days, and I have obligations."

"I observe, Miss Fairlie, that you wear a wedding ring."

"I am not married, if that's what you want to know," she answered at once. "It isn't a wedding ring. I wish it were. It was given to me as a friendship ring—a token of our engagement by the man I had hoped to marry."

"Peter Farway."

"You could hardly escape knowing about it if you came here," she said. There was no bitterness in her voice. "He gave me the ring just before he went to Scotland. I am sure you know all about it."

"No. It was your father's death I was asked to investigate. But since you have opened the subject, perhaps you will not mind a question or two." At her gesture, he continued, "I take it your intention to marry was general knowledge here?"

"We saw no reason to keep it secret."

"We have been told that Sir Charles Farway disapproved of your plans," said Pons.

At this point Miss Fairlie's tight control gave way. Tears came to her eyes. She turned her head away, fumbled for her handkerchief, and held it for a few moments to her eyes while she fought to regain her composure. When she looked up again her lips were fixed with determination.

"Forgive me," she said. "I loved them both so very much—Peter and my father. It is very hard for me." She sighed heavily. "But no, Mr. Pons, I'm sure it was not like that. Sir Charles wanted Peter to be sure, to be absolutely certain that he wanted to marry me. True, he sent him to Scotland, but Peter explained that to me. I too wanted Peter to be certain. I was sure in my heart that he was—as I was."

"I submit, however, Miss Fairlie, that some doubt about Sir Charles's motives remained," said Pons.

She gazed at him full for a long moment before replying. "I suppose that would be inevitable in the circumstances. Peter's death

affected us all very much, all of us who loved him. And he was their only child. They've tried to fill the void with nieces and nephews. But you must know that, too — there's no need my saying it."

"Returning to your father," said Pons after a thoughtful pause. "Had he ever spoken to you of enemies?"

"No."

"Of danger?"

"No."

"Of anything troubling him?"

She shook her head. "But something *was* troubling him. I began to notice it not long after Sir Charles's death. At first I thought it had to do with problems of the estate, but I came to think otherwise."

"He never spoke to you about it?"

"No, Mr. Pons. Not so much as a hint. But that was his nature. He was much given to keeping things to himself — until he was sure that the time had come to speak." Her frown deepened. "But I know he was troubled — deeply troubled. I asked him several times what bothered him, but he brushed my questions away. That was like him, too."

Pons gazed at her for a long time, until she began to stir uneasily. Then he spoke, gravely. "Miss Fairlie, I dislike to alarm you, but you may be in some danger."

Her eyes flashed. She was startled.

Pons went on. "Your father was killed to prevent his telling what troubled him."

"How can you be sure of that?"

"There is nothing other so far that offers a tenable motive. He was on his way to see me, we believe, when his life was taken."

Miss Fairlie lost a little of her colour. Her hands clenched.

"It must sooner or later occur to his murderer that you may have been in his confidence, and that you too may know the secret to prevent telling which he was killed."

"But — I know nothing."

"The killer may not know that. I do think that for the time being you are safe. In time you may not be. Do you have any objection if Sir Hugh arranges for some kind of surveillance?"

Miss Fairlie did not know what to say. She was disconcerted rather than alarmed. She kept on clenching and unclenching her hands. She looked away. Presently she swung her head back.

"I'd hate to be kept under surveillance," she said. "Tell me frankly, Mr. Pons, do you really think it is necessary?"

"If the murderer knew your father as well as I suspect he did, no. But we are bound to consider the possibility that he may not have known him well enough to be fully aware of his secretiveness."

She smiled, reassured. "Then, if you don't mind, I'll take my chances. You've warned me. I'll be wary."

Her eyes fixed suddenly on someone beyond us. A faint smile touched her lips. She gave a little nod.

Gerald Farway stood across the room, in the act of tipping his hat to her. Behind him stood his cousin Rebecca, her face a dark mask. She stared at Diana Fairlie without any sign of recognition. As Diana looked toward her, she turned abruptly and walked out of the room. Gerald clapped his hat to his head and followed.

"Miss Fairlie," said Pons again.

"Yes, Mr. Pons?" She turned to look at him once more. It was impossible to determine what she might have thought of Rebecca Farway's deliberate cutting of her.

"Once more what troubled your father? If he never said anything to you, how did you know?"

"Oh, a woman always knows these things," said she. "Father was restless—he couldn't sit still—he was preoccupied—and he had never been that when he came to see me before Sir Charles's death." She broke off abruptly. "But, truthfully, Mr. Pons, I'm afraid I can't tell you anything you want to know, I really can't. I would, certainly, if only I could."

"If I find myself in Cheltenham, I may call on you," said Pons then.

For some reason, Pons's suggestion disturbed her. I saw her fingers tighten on the handkerchief she still held.

"Unless there is some reason you would rather I didn't," continued Pons.

"I'm sure," she said, choosing her words carefully, "I am at your service. No one more than I myself wants to see my father's murderer caught. I could come to Frome at any time you need me. You have only to send word."

"Thank you, Miss Fairlie."

She stood up, lowering her veil once more. She walked quickly away, pausing to say a few words to Sir Hugh Parrington. Then she was gone and Sir Hugh stood waiting for us.

"A fine girl, Diana," he boomed. "A tragedy they didn't marry."

"It occurs to me to wonder," said Pons, as we walked out of the building into the now thinning rainfall, "now we've heard all about Sir Charles's reaction to that projected marriage—how did Mr. Fairlie react to it? Does anyone know?"

"I would suppose the idea would have appealed to him—with his closeness to the family and all," said the Chief Constable. "I don't recall that he ever said, one way or the other." He shrugged. "But that's not important. I've had some reports that are. Let's just step round to the station. We've turned up the clothing—hat, coat, even the false beard—just as you guessed we might. Found along the tracks—one piece here, another a bit farther on, and then the last. As thrown out of the train from another compartment somewhere along."

"I am not surprised," said Pons dryly.

"Well, come along and see what you can make of them."

The Chief Constable strode briskly through the rain with never a thought of the weather, always a step or two ahead of us, until he drew up at the police station, where he stood aside to let us pass.

Superintendent Ian Rossiter, a tall man whose portliness did not offer any impediment to the quickness of his movements, took us directly to the garments found along the railway line beyond Frome, recounting precisely where they had been found, and by whom—information which appeared to be lost on Pons, who seemed neither to know the places Rossiter mentioned nor care about them, save to point out that the discovery defined, relatively, where the attack on Robert Farway had taken place.

The garments and beard were on a table in a locked room. They had evidently been discovered before the rain had fallen for, though damp, they were not wet. The coat was long—of a length that on a man of medium height must come well below the knees; it was of a rough cloth, loosely woven, but for all that it looked like the kind of coat that might be worn by a countryman—even a shepherd out among his sheep, it was not an inexpensive garment.

Pons examined it with care, looking in vain for any mark that might identify its maker. There was none; it had been cut carefully away from both the collar and the rim of the inner pocket, for the coat, surprisingly, had such a pocket in the lining that went down three-quarters of its length. Pons felt the cloth, pressed the coat to his nostrils.

"Hrumph! Chloroform," said Sir Hugh. "I caught a smell of it."

"Oh, there is more," said Pons. "This coat has been worn outside in open country hillsides. It has a pungency about it over and above that medicinal odour you've already detected. Try it again." He thrust the coat at the Chief Constable.

Sir Hugh raised it to his nostrils in turn.

"Try the hem, the hem," said Pons impatiently.

"Yes, of course," agreed the Chief Constable. "So it has been worn by someone in the country. And Frome is a market town—it could be anyone."

"I submit it could not," said Pons. "The coat is not, despite its appearance, an old one. It has not been well cared-for, but it shows none of the signs of wear. The hem of it, which shows some discoloration, has been frequently brushed against something wet. I suggest it was dew; that would account for the pungency so evident to us. The cuffs and one pocket—the right side—we may postulate a right-handed man. . . ."

"No fancy tricks here, eh?" put in Sir Hugh.

"These are the source of the medicinal odour, which you say is chloroform," Pons went on.

"Let me smell it," I asked.

Sir Hugh handed the coat to me. Pons now took up the hat and turned it round and round in his hands. I smelled the coat in turn—hem, cuffs, pocket. The typical sweetness of chloroform was unmistakable. I said as much.

"Yes, yes," said Pons brusquely. "Nothing more?"

"A medicinal odour, yes," I said.

"Not chloroform?"

I shook my head. "No, this is not chloroform. Quite possibly chloroform was spilled here—and on the cuff, but that is sweet. This is not."

"What does it suggest, Parker?"

"Some kind of antiseptic. I cannot determine what was used here. One other thing. Rubber."

Pons chuckled. "Of course, he wore rubber gloves. Thrust them into his pocket."

"To avoid being burned by the chloroform, obviously," I said.

Pons was still turning the hat over in his hands. "Used by an angler," he said now. "Dry flies have been attached to the band."

"We saw that," said the Chief Constable.

"The hat has been worn more consistently than the coat," Pons went on. "The signs of wear are everywhere—on the brim, the

sweat-band. It is the kind of hat used again by countrymen—particularly by hikers, anglers, sportsmen. And not inexpensive." He held it to his nose.

"Not a medicinal smell again," said Sir Hugh.

"No—the other."

"Well, it is like leaves of some kind, foliage," said the Chief Constable, smelling it. "There is a bed of herbs at Farway Hall that has something of the same pungency."

"Yes, it is herb-like," agreed Pons. "But not specifically of rosemary or thyme or any herb commonly found in herb gardens."

"All of them together," said Sir Hugh.

"Heather," said Pons.

He took the hat again. "How would it come to have such a smell? Surely not because it was dropped to lie in a bed of herbs! No, I submit it was taken off along a trout or salmon stream when in use by an angler, and left to lie perhaps for hours at a time in heather which imparted its aroma to it. Not just on one occasion, but habitually. The fragrance is strongest along the brim. If it had been packed away in a scented place—with a sachet of herb-leaves, for example—the entire hat would have been permeated with it."

The beard was plainly of commercial manufacture. Unlike the garments, however, it looked new.

"Bought for the occasion," said Pons. "Any shop the length and breadth of the isles, specializing in supplying masquerade or dramatic costumes or the paraphernalia of mummers could have supplied this beard. It is very probably a standard piece, and there is nothing to identify it, to set it apart from any other like it."

"So that we'd have a hard time—an impossible task to find where it was sold," said the Chief Constable.

"Not impossible, no. Improbable for the moment. But once a suspect clearly emerges, you should have but slight difficulty associating its purchase with him. The same thing is true of the hat and coat."

"We'll set inquiries afoot," said Sir Hugh. "Neither hat nor coat appears to be of local manufacture."

"Look farther abroad," said Pons cryptically. "No local man bent on murder would acquire a disguise here in Frome." He turned from the beard and garments and stood looking out of the window. The rain had begun to fall again, a heavy, sodden downpour. "What have you done about tracing the chloroform?" he asked without turning.

"No trace," said Superintendent Rossiter. "We've been all over Frome and Westbury. We're looking into other nearby sources. We can't find any source for it."

"And the murderer? Where did he get on the train?"

Sir Hugh cleared his throat. "We can't seem to find that, Pons. We've sent descriptions of him all the way back along the line as far as Exeter. There's no report of such an old man's taking the train anywhere. No booking-clerk remembers him and he was distinctive enough to have been remembered. Nichols here recalled him quite clearly when old Fairlie was done in."

"So he carried his disguise on to the train in his bag," mused Pons, "and put it on when he wanted to use it."

"He must have known, then, that Robert Farway would be on the train," said Sir Hugh.

Pons nodded. "He knew that, beyond doubt. But there was no secret about that. Everyone at Farway Hall knew it, including the servants."

"And then, having worn these things," put in Rossiter, "he got rid of them because he knew he couldn't use them again."

Pons turned. "Let me draw your attention to the significant alteration in his pattern."

"What alteration?" asked Sir Hugh bluntly.

"On the initial occasion—the prelude to the murder of Jonas Fairlie—he came to the booking-office wearing his disguise. On this occasion he carried his disguise concealed in his bag. That is the significant alteration. I commend it to you. Meanwhile, I have another small line of inquiry to explore, if you will excuse us."

"You can't walk in this rain," said the Chief Constable. "We'll run you over."

On the way back to the George, Pons said nothing. Sir Hugh was voluble, but Pons only nodded once or twice by way of reply. At the hotel he mounted rapidly to our quarters and began to pace the floor. I observed that he took from an inner pocket a folded paper; he looked at it from time to time, frowning, until at last he came to a stop in the middle of the room.

"Fool that I am!" he cried.

"What is it?" I asked.

"It is plain as a pikestaff," he answered. "Parker, whenever I am prone to praise my poor powers, remind me of the murder of Jonas Fairlie. It is all here," he went on, tapping the paper in his fingers.

I had lain down on the bed; now I came to my feet and strode to

his side. The paper he carried was that on which he had written down the initials copied from the writing-pad found in Fairlie's room at Farway Hall.

"We have been proceeding without adequate thought on the assumption that these are initials," he said.

"Surely they cannot be anything else!"

"Surely they are," retorted Pons. "Why should they not be? Let us just separate them."

So saying, he took a pencil and drew a line down between them, separating the initial letters from the secondary ones.

"They are still," I said, "initials."

Pons shook his head impatiently. "Yes, yes of a sort. We are misled by Farway's intended helpfulness. Hattrays and Ainslie, indeed! Let us just forget for the nonce any but the first row of letters."

"Yes," I said, "*G*, *R*, and *J*. What do you make of them? They still remain the initials of Ainslie and the Hattrays."

"But that is not all they remain," said Pons. "Forget these cousins of the Farways."

I stood mystified.

"Come, come, Parker. Are these not also Farway initials?"

"There is not an *F* on the page," I protested.

"*G* could stand as well for Gerald, could it not? And *R* for Rebecca or Robert? And *J* for Jill?"

"What of that? A mere coincidence," I said.

"No, no. Ainslie and the Hattrays made up the coincidence."

"Well, then, what of the second row of letters?"

"We agreed, did we not, that the indecipherable letters above these initials were numerals?"

"Yes, we did, though we couldn't be sure of them."

"Very well, supposing Fairlie set down a date."

"I accept the premise," I said.

"Capital! Then of what possible relationship could these initials be? Think, man!"

"I am thinking," I said. "Of course, they are related—I can see that."

"Then you must see how."

"Well, Pons—let us see—Fairlie puts down a date. Beneath it he writes—if you say so, Gerald Farway's first initial. And then Rebecca's or Robert's—I suppose it is Rebecca's. And then, Jill's. He means to discover where they were on that date!"

"Ah, Parker, you do not disappoint me! It is almost two decades since you have observed my methods, and since they are really quite simple, you should be able to continue."

"Of course," I cried. "I see it all now. What Fairlie meant by that second row was the place the place they were. Of course. Gerald- 'A' means that Gerald was absent from home on that date. And 'H' means 'at home' so Rebecca or Robert and Jill were at home or not away from the place they might have been expected to be." And, now I had got started, I was not to be outdone. "And that upper line—those numerals—" I went on, "must have been a date, like August 17, 1937—however old Fairlie put it down!"

Pons positively beamed.

"So now, Parker," he cried, "you know one of Mr. Fairlie's secrets."

My enthusiasm faded. "I have to confess I do not," I said, "any more than you know the identity of the murderer!"

He made an impatient gesture with one hand. "Oh, I know the identity of the murderer," he said. "That is not the problem. The problem is to prove his guilt in court."

"You do!" I cried, astounded.

"You ought not to confuse knowledge of the identity of a murderer with the legal evidence needed to convict him. These are two different matters. It is one thing to make what appears to be a brilliant deduction, but quite another to marshal evidence in so convincing a manner that a jury has no alternative but to find the defendant guilty. The former is relatively easy—the latter anything but easy."

I knew better than to ask Pons for the name of the murderer. "I still do not know—as you put it—the one of old Fairlie's secrets."

"The reason he was coming to see me? Surely that is now obvious, Parker."

"Not to me."

"Now consider. Since Sir Charles Farway died perfectly naturally, so much cannot be gainsaid—two other people in the family died—Sir Charles's brother Austin fell to his death—his nephew Ronald was drowned off the coast of Wales. Prior to the old man's death his son Peter died—shot in an accident with his own gun. Is that not a remarkable sequence of accidents?"

"Pons, you cannot mean . . . ?"

"Ah, but that is what Mr. Fairlie came to think, did he not? He

began to nose about to make a great number of journeys. He made inquiries, however discreet, in Frome. He went to Wales, to Scotland and I have no doubt he made inquiries there, also. He must certainly have found some ground for his suspicions, and the more he found, the more troubled he grew. He must have become convinced that someone was attempting to wipe out the family, taking infinite pains and a great deal of time to do it. But all that activity on the part of one who had not previously been so active could not have gone unnoticed. Somewhere in the course of his inquiries he attracted the attention of the murderer. And at about the same time he began to come uncomfortably close to establishing his identity and the fact distressed him so much that he wanted to shift that responsibility."

"To you."

"It would seem so."

"But the motive?" I protested.

"Could it be other than greed? Sir Charles's estate. It must have been known that the property would be left, after Lady Farway's death, to the surviving nieces and nephews."

"But Sir Charles had changed his will," I pointed out.

"The murderer cannot have known that, can he?" said Pons, his eyes dancing. "Or she," he added, chuckling. "It now becomes more than ever necessary for us to learn where Mr. Fairlie went on that mysterious journey with Sir Charles, after which the old man changed his will so precipitately. I think, for one venture, we will take a little journey ourselves - to Cheltenham first - and then perhaps to Wales."

VII. A VISIT TO CHELTENHAM

The inquest having freed Jonas Fairlie's body for burial, brief services were held early the following afternoon. The Chief Constable appeared at the George to take us to the church and subsequently to the cemetery. Once again the family was represented by Miss Rebecca and Gerald Farway; once more Ralph Bramshaw came from Farway Printers, Ltd. This time, however, Diana Fairlie did not sit alone; she was in the company of Douglas Abercrombie, whose dour countenance lent itself fittingly to the services.

Miss Fairlie did not once raise her veil, nor did she look around

to see who might be there. At the cemetery she accepted condolences from the two Farways and Bramshaw. Pons made no attempt to speak to her; he had observed that Rebecca Farway had glanced in his direction several times, both in church and at the cemetery, uneasily, sometimes almost with hostility.

It was therefore not a surprise to me when Pons walked over to her as she and her cousin were on their way to his car.

"I would like a few words with you, Miss Farway," he said.

"Hadn't you better be about, with the others, catching the man who attacked my brother?" she asked coldly.

Gerald's hand tightened warningly on her arm.

"When is it convenient for me to see you?" pressed Pons.

"This is as good a time as any," she answered. Her face, patched with sunlight and shadow thrown by the elms that towered overhead, was both proud and defiant, and also, I was certain, betrayed some disquiet.

"Very well," said Pons. "I want to ask specifically about the obligation of seeing to it that the doors and windows of Farway Hall were secure at night. Whose was it?"

"It was either Pyatt's or mine. Pyatt is the butler, as I think you know."

Pons nodded. "Thinking back to the night Mr. Fairlie was murdered—who saw to the doors?"

"Pyatt did it first. And when I went to bed I went around to the front and the back." She hesitated, then added, "I didn't see to the side doors, but they aren't usually unlocked once uncertain weather begins."

"And when you had done so, you retired to your quarters?"

"Yes, I did."

"And did not stir from them?"

Her eyes flashed angrily. "I haven't said so. No one asked me. I did go out again to see to Aunt Ellen. I thought I heard her moving about; I went to see if she needed me."

"Did she?"

"Well, yes, she did. She hadn't been moving around, no—but she did want some hot milk. I went downstairs for it."

"You encountered no one?"

"No." Once again there was a curious hesitation in her voice.

It did not go unnoticed. "I put it to you, Miss Farway, that you heard or saw something you didn't think to report to the police."

"Perhaps that is so," she answered.

"What was it?"

"It was something I thought I saw. I can't be sure . . ."

"Go on, Miss Farway." Pons's voice had hardened a little with his growing impatience.

"I thought I saw a light under the door to Mr. Fairlie's rooms," she said then. "I believed, naturally, that Mr. Fairlie had come in, and I dismissed it from mind. But the more I have thought about it—I suppose it must have been someone else. . . ."

"His murderer searching his room," said Pons bluntly.

"I suppose it must have been," she said.

"You heard no one moving about later—as, for instance, someone you might have thought to be Mr. Fairlie leaving his quarters?"

She shook her head. "Nothing. When I brought Aunt Ellen's milk up to her, Mr. Fairlie's door was dark. I naturally thought he had gone to bed. It was late."

"What time?"

"It must have been one side or the other of eleven o'clock. Not far away from that hour."

"Thank you, Miss Farway."

We stood aside to let her pass.

"She is apprehensive," I said.

"I daresay," agreed Pons. "She has not told all she knows or put into words what she suspects."

The Chief Constable disengaged himself from Diana Fairlie and the lawyer, and came walking leisurely toward us. The afternoon had grown unseasonably warm, and Sir Hugh was fanning himself with his hat. Chaffinches sang from the far edge of the cemetery, and now Diana Fairlie and Abercrombie began to move away from the graveside so that the men there could go about their work.

"I have one or two little tasks I would appreciate your performing, Sir Hugh," said Pons, as the Chief Constable came up. "And, once done, I rather think we need only sit back and wait upon developments."

"Whatever you say."

"It may upset Rossiter a little, but he'll get over it," continued Pons. "Before anything else, however, I want to pursue some inquiries elsewhere—Glasgow, Cheltenham, perhaps Wales."

"Oh, those are the places to which old Fairlie traveled," said the Chief Constable. "Though I'm blessed if I can imagine what you might turn up there. We don't even know precisely where he went."

"In Scotland, perhaps not," agreed Pons. "But in Cheltenham certainly to visit his daughter—and in Wales to his own cottage. He may have gone farther afield in those places—that remains to be disclosed."

"When do you go?"

We had now reached Sir Hugh's car. Before getting in, Pons paused to reply. "I think there is little time to be lost. We expect to leave later this afternoon. We'll be back, however, as quickly as events permit. In any case, we'll retain our quarters at the George."

I was not destined to accompany Pons into Scotland, however, for a trunk call caught me at the George while we were making ready to leave; my *locum* had encountered complications in one of my patients, who in turn demanded to have me in attendance. There was no alternative—my patient was one of long standing, and I could not refuse his request. We parted company at Paddington, where I promised to meet him as soon as possible at the George.

It was two days before I rejoined him. He had preceded me by only a few hours.

"You are just in time, Parker," he cried. "We are off to Cheltenham in an hour."

He was animated and looked freshened, as if he had been tramping the Highlands.

"What did you discover in Scotland?" I asked, as I unpacked.

"Nothing I had not previously assured myself could be discovered there," he said.

"Evidence?"

"I leave that to the province of the police," he said. "When I am engaged in one of these little inquiries on my own, I will pursue every piece of evidence, no matter how small or trivial; but when I am associated with the police, I prefer to leave the routine work to them."

"You found trace of Fairlie?"

"I did, indeed. I fancy, though, I made considerable more show of myself than Mr. Fairlie did."

More than this he would not say, but this was to be expected of him if he were not quite convinced that what he might say were beyond question. In good time he would speak.

Within the hour, we were on our way to Cheltenham.

"This is one of England's loveliest cities," reflected Pons as we rode into it almost two hours later. "Situated as it is between the

Severn valley and the High Cotswolds, it is ideally placed for visitors to this part of England. You know what a warm place it has in my affections."

"I have heard so before this," I said. "But why are we coming here now?"

"Ah, Parker, you are ever a man for driving straight to the point. Here I am in the mood to appreciate the beautiful old trees, the wide streets, the classic facades of the city – and you insist upon the mundane affair of the moment." He sighed. "We are here to keep an eye on Miss Fairlie."

"You think she may be in immediate danger, then?"

"Not as much so as we are likely to be in a day or two," he replied cryptically.

"What then?" I persisted.

"Why, I am curious to know how she lives. We know very little about her. Miss Fairlie, everyone tells us, lives in Cheltenham. She says she works half-days. Now that is curious, is it not? Why not full days? Moreover, she has withdrawn so effectively from Frome that little is known of her in Cheltenham, which is but sixty miles or so from her former home. Granted that her father was secretive, it is no less uncommon."

"Oh, come, Pons," I said. "It is only natural. Despite what she says, she was wounded by what must have been some opposition to the marriage they planned – and she now wants nothing more to do with Frome."

"Did she not seem to you eminently sensible?"

"I thought so."

"Certainly not the kind of woman to indulge in such romanticism as you suggest as reason for her cutting herself off from Frome. She must have had friends in Frome. We have heard nothing of them. Her father visits her. She does not visit him."

"She has plainly made a new life for herself here in Cheltenham," I protested. "One finds, as one goes on through life, that it becomes impossible to maintain all one's former friendships and acquaintances."

"True, true," agreed Pons testily, "but it is easy to begin anew, to cut one's self off when there are no ties. I submit that she had the strongest of all ties to Frome and to Farway Hall, for her father still lived in that town, indeed, in the Hall itself, now that she had left him, and he was an important factor in the lives and business of the Farways."

"She struck me as a woman of independence and spirit," I said. "It is the sort of thing that kind of woman would do."

Pons smiled. "Perhaps I ought to defer to your superior knowledge of the fair sex. After all, you have married one of them, and you are clearly in a more authoritative position than I."

"Ah, that is elementary," I said.

"But here we are in the centre of Cheltenham."

We were now walking along the Promenade, having come on foot from the station along tree-naved streets, but none so fair as the Promenade itself, one of the most beautiful streets in all England, green with trees, colourful with flowers, flanked by handsome buildings, ranging from the municipal offices to rows of shops.

"Now there is a telephone booth," said Pons. "Let me just step into it and see whether Miss Fairlie is listed."

He suited his actions to his words, while I idled on the kerb.

In a few minutes he returned. "We seem to be within a short distance of her flat. I believe it is on the first floor above one of the shops near the Neptune Fountain just ahead. Let us just pay her a visit."

Miss Fairlie's flat was indeed above one of the shops along the Promenade near the Neptune Fountain, a particularly attractive area of the street, though the immediate quarters adjacent to the flat were not singular but rather ordinary, however neat in appearance.

Miss Fairlie, however, was not at home. There was no answer to our assault on the bell.

"It is almost noon," I said. "Mornings may be her half days. Or she may be out to lunch."

"Let us sit down over across the street near the fountain and watch the outer entrance," suggested Pons.

Accordingly, we crossed to the benches arranged between the fountain and the street, and sat down facing the entrance to the stairs that led to Miss Fairlie's quarters.

"I have been thinking," I said reflectively.

"Commendable!"

I ignored him. "Did not Mr. Abercrombie say that Sir Charles Farway had settled a sum of money on Miss Fairlie?"

"I have not forgotten it."

"There you have the explanation for her working only half days. Why should she wear herself out at some task which may be little to her liking when she has funds enough to be comfortable without

working all day long five or six days a week? It is all very simple when you look at it that way."

"It is, indeed," said Pons.

I waited to hear some withering comment follow, but I heard none. Pons sat in contemplative silence, his head cocked a little to one side though his eyes remained fixed upon the street as if he were listening to the songs and chirpings of birds; for the masses of foliage on the Promenade invited them—robins, a missel-thrush, blackbirds, dunnocks, a green-finch; once one managed to shut out the sounds of the street, which was not difficult to do here, the voices of the birds could be heard very pleasantly.

So we sat in silence, contemplating the surroundings. I saw, I thought, a great many American tourists; I had spent enough time in the States to find it easy to pick them out in any crowd, for they were much less reserved, indeed at times almost boisterous, and less conservative in their selection of clothing. There were, too, some people manifestly in Cheltenham for the waters; these could be identified almost as readily, though, to be sure, most of them were past middle age.

Pons's eyes never once left the entrance to Miss Fairlie's building.

Presently he spoke. "There she comes, Parker. She has come directly from her work."

I saw Miss Fairlie walking along the street toward the shop above which she lived, and watched her, as Pons watched.

"Let us give her a moment or two to remove her coat, but not enough time to prepare lunch," said Pons.

Miss Fairlie vanished into the building across the street. I followed her in my thoughts up the stairs along the hall into her flat. Hat and coat off.

"Now," said Pons.

We crossed the street and mounted to Miss Fairlie's floor. Pons pressed the bell button.

We waited.

Miss Fairlie crossed to the door, slipped a night-latch on to chain the door, and opened it a trifle. She looked out, cautiously.

"I am pleased to see you have not taken my warning lightly, Miss Fairlie," said my companion.

"Mr. Pons! And Dr. Parker! You surprise me."

She slipped the night-latch off again and threw the door open wide.

"Please come in."

If there were any hesitation about her invitation, she quickly concealed it under the customary apologies I have found women prone to make—the quarters were not in order for lack of time, and that kind of talk; though, as far as I could see, her rooms were in immaculate condition, just as she had left them for work earlier in the day.

The central room into which we walked and where, at Miss Fairlie's invitation, we sat down, was modestly but not cheaply appointed, revealing every evidence of good taste. Nevertheless, Miss Fairlie made a show of cleaning up—moving around to pick up a copy of a book and restore it to her shelves of books—of which there were a good number, picking a small peaked cap off the top of one of her two bookcases and carrying it into an inner room, straightening a chair—all those little actions I have seen my own wife perform innumerable times in the face of visitors.

For once she was at no lack of words, talking constantly as she moved about setting her room to rights, as she thought it ought to be, but finally, having finished, she sat down herself.

"You are surely not guarding me," she said then.

"No, Miss Fairlie," answered Pons. "It is only that, finding ourselves in Cheltenham, it occurred to us to call."

"Have there been new developments then?" she asked.

"Yes, but I am not at liberty to talk of them," said Pons. "I would like to assure myself that you will be at our disposal if we should send for you at any time."

"Of course. I told you as much."

"And at your work?"

"Sir Hugh knows where to reach me if I am called from there." She did not offer this information to Pons, however.

"I have been attempting to trace your father's routes," Pons went on. "I have been to Scotland. Tomorrow Dr. Parker and I will go to Wales."

"I don't know what Father did in Glasgow, but there is no secret about his place in Merioneth. He went there to think out his problems—which I suppose were principally those of the Farways—and to rest. That part of the coast is quite secluded. Father had access to the beach, and he loved to walk the hills. He was quite a naturalist, Mr. Pons. When I was a child he taught me much of what he knew about the birds and animals."

"He seems to have been something of an enigma, Miss Fairlie—reclusive and secretive."

"Why, I suppose Mother's death was a great shock to him. He turned inward. People do this sort of thing—they retreat into themselves. Father was more sensitive than most people suspected, and like so many sensitive people—he did his best to hide it."

"As you do," said Pons.

She acknowledged this with a brisk nod.

"You live very quietly here," said Pons. "I see little evidence of theatre programmes."

"I spend my evenings at home, Mr. Pons."

"With books. I saw, when you picked it up, that you are fond of *The Wind in the Willows*."

"It's one of my favourite books," she said. "I have read it twice—once aloud." She smiled.

"Few more charming books have come out of England," agreed Pons. "And T. S. Eliot, too—that is surely *The Waste Land* I see on the near shelf, is it not?"

"I like to keep up with what is new in books, Mr. Pons. Reading is one of my chief pleasures."

"And there is *From a View to a Death*," Pons went on, his eyes moving from one book to another on Miss Fairlie's shelves.

"Yes, Anthony Powell is one of the newer novelists. I admire his style."

"And Milne—charming." He gazed again at Miss Fairlie, with an enigmatic smile haunting his lips.

"May I offer you tea, gentlemen?"

Pons came to his feet so abruptly as to seem rude. "No, thank you," he said briskly. "We have imposed on your good graces long enough—overlong, Miss Fairlie. We must be going."

She was too startled to protest, and by the time she found her voice, Pons was at the door.

"I cannot understand you, Pons," I said as we were going down the stairs toward the street. "You were—well, *rude*."

"Perhaps. But it would have been more rude to stay. That young woman was tense with fear that we might."

"You cannot mean it!"

"Indeed I do."

"I saw no evidence of it."

"You were not looking for it. I was."

We gained the street, and I started up on the way to the station.

"Not yet, Parker. Let us not be too hasty. We are bound across the street from the place we left but a few minutes ago."

"What on earth for?"

"Ah, I enjoy the sylvan beauty of the Promenade near the Neptune Fountain. Need there be a better reason?"

"There needn't but I'm sure there is," I said. "I have lived in your company too long to be deceived."

"That is either intuition or inductive rationalization," said Pons, chuckling.

"It is neither," I said. "It is professional knowledge of the subject."

"You almost said 'patient.' "

We crossed the street as we spoke, and found ourselves once more facing the row of shops on the side we had left.

"You will have observed that Miss Fairlie's was one of at least four flats on her floor," said Pons. "I have some slight curiosity about her neighbours, if you will bear with me."

"Aha! I knew it. 'Sylvan beauty' indeed!"

"So let us just observe for a time who goes in or out over there. It is the noon hour, and we may expect the tenants to make an appearance."

"To be precise," I said, "it is a quarter to one."

Pons did not respond. He had settled himself and was now keeping an eye on the entrance across the street. As it was in full view and we were not so easily discernible from the street—watching the entrance was not difficult, except for the number of people who passed constantly up and down the Promenade.

We sat there for perhaps forty minutes. In the course of that time six people entered the stairway to the flats above—an elderly man and woman, a young mother with her small son, a man I took to be young, though I could not see his face clearly for the hat pulled low over his eyes, and a gentleman of perhaps thirty-five.

"Did that not look like Gerald Farway?" I asked.

"He had the general appearance, yes," agreed Pons, "but that appearance is presented by a very high percentage of men in that age group in England. And if he intended to call on Miss Fairlie, why, he has made an ill-timed visit, for here she comes now."

Miss Fairlie was indeed emerging from her quarters. She carried a market basket.

"She's going shopping," I said. "Perhaps she means to have lunch at home."

"Let us wait on her return."

She was back in but twenty minutes, her basket filled.

"We may as well return to Frome," said Pons then.

"If ever I was on a wild goose chase," I grumbled on the way up the street, "this was it."

"We shall have to be content with a few feathers, will we not, Parker?" asked Pons, with that irritating air of having added significantly to his knowledge while I manifestly had not.

VIII. JONAS FAIRLIE'S RETREAT

When I woke the following morning the day of our departure for Jonas Fairlie's retreat in Merioneth Pons had already gone out. I got up and dressed leisurely, since I had packed the previous night, on our return from Cheltenham, and then descended to the hotel restaurant for breakfast. As it happened, I sat near the wireless, which carried soft music to the breakfasters, for I was not alone in the restaurant.

Thus it was that I heard the announcer detail the morning news and was astounded to hear Pons's name coming over the air. I listened in growing amazement.

"Superintendent Ian Rossiter announced last night that the well-known London detective, Solar Pons, who has been working in co-operation with the police in the matter of the murder of Jonas Fairlie, expects to reveal the identity of the murderer on his return from Merioneth, to which he is going today in an effort to tie up some loose ends of the case. Mr. Pons was drawn into the case at the suggestion of the Chief Constable, Sir Hugh Parrington, for certain evidence was introduced early in the case to show that Mr. Fairlie was on his way to call on the detective when he was murdered. Mr. Pons and his companion, Dr. Lyndon Parker, will leave early today for the cottage Mr. Fairlie always maintained in Wales. Asked whether Mr. Pons had given anyone any hint of the identity of the murderer, Superintendent Rossiter was forced to admit that he had not, that Pons alone was confident of that knowledge and would not, in justice to all concerned, reveal it until the appropriate time."

Hearing my own name made me feel the cynosure of every eye. I left the restaurant hurriedly and hastened back to our quarters.

Pons had returned. As I entered, he was standing in the middle of the room looking with some satisfaction at the morning paper. Without giving me time to speak, he thrust the paper at me.

I had a foreboding of what I would see — and there indeed it was, in a prominent box on the front page —

LONDON DETECTIVE TO NAME FAIRLIE MURDERER

and below it, substantially the same announcement I had just heard on the wireless.

I threw the paper aside. "How could you tolerate this?" I asked.

" 'Tolerate' is not the word, my dear fellow," he replied.

"Permit, then."

"Gently, gently, Parker — I myself urged it upon the press."

I was even more astonished. "This is unlike you, Pons — unworthy of you."

"Ah, there is method in it, Parker, I assure you. I could see no other course that might serve so well to bring this matter to a conclusion."

"Now that is an ambiguous statement, if ever I heard one," I cried.

"How familiarity does breed contempt!" said Pons, chuckling. "Believe me, I know what I am about."

"Why, if the murderer sees this he may be tempted to act. It is an open invitation to murder!"

"That is what I meant it to be."

"You cannot mean it!"

"Surely it must have come home to you, Parker, that we are dealing with a cold, ruthless, and resourceful murderer. I know that only the most painstaking and routine police work can assemble the evidence we need for conviction — and in the time that may take, someone else may die. We cannot risk it. We must tempt him to act. The attack on Robert Farway is proof that we have rattled him — and this announcement is calculated to rattle him further. I fancy we will not long be alone at Jonas Fairlie's cottage."

"It's hardly a method of which I can approve," I said. "If that is what you mean to do, we should go armed, at the very least."

"Sir Hugh has provided us with small arms. I have them packed. But I fancy we are in no danger of that kind of violence. Simulated accident is his forte — bullets may be traced, and are in themselves proof of homicide. The contrived accident always leaves a residue of doubt, if indeed it ever comes under suspicion."

"Where is this cottage of Fairlie's?" I asked then.

"Why, it is near Llwyngwrl. From such description as I have of the area – it is not familiar to me, I should mention – the cottage is away from the village, on the coast below Barmouth Bay."

"On the seashore?"

"No, up the slopes from the shore, with access to the water's edge; a path leads down."

"Pons, I do not like this," I said.

"My dear fellow! Stay here, if you prefer."

"You know I will not. But this fellow is not playing. If all you say is true, he means to kill, not just to frighten."

"That he does," agreed Pons with equanimity I could not share.

Whatever else I might have said was cut short by a loud drumming on the door. Pons opened it to the Chief Constable, who pushed into the room booming, "Are you ready?"

"Sir Hugh is driving us," said Pons.

"We'll go up through Gloucester and Hereford, and bear on to Machynlleth and Towyn," said the Chief Constable. "Were you satisfied with the announcement?"

"It should serve," said Pons.

"Went out over the B.B.C. late last night and again this morning," Sir Hugh went on. "We've released it generally. Don't doubt that everyone who might be interested knows it by now. I don't know what you're up to, Pons, but I do hope we'll have him on your word."

"Unless I am very much mistaken, in not more than three days," promised Pons.

"I don't follow you, Pons, but we're going along with you. Another thing – you asked us to keep the family under surveillance. Gerald has left Frome, reportedly for London on business."

"I see. Was that before or after the first announcement of our plans?"

"I suppose it was after, but his plans must certainly have been made before. He left this morning, early. But Bramshaw knew he was going well before last night – he knew it two days ago."

"It might do no harm to find out where he is in London – and try to reach him."

"Right. I'll call Rossiter before we leave."

"The other members of the family are where they should be?"

The Chief Constable looked unhappy. "All but Jill. She's managed to give the French police the slip. No trace of her."

"How long has she been gone?"

Sir Hugh looked even more unhappy. "Well, Pons the fact is, they never made contact. They can't find that she returned from England." He shrugged. "Another thing they did find out she apparently left for England two days before she said she did. At least, she left her lodgings then."

"Ah, we make progress," said Pons dryly. "I saw too that but one newspaper carried the length of time we expected to remain at Fairlie's cottage—two days."

"The B.B.C. aired it. And some of the papers surely carried it." He shook his head. "Some of my men don't like it you'd expect that. But at least it's better than Scotland Yard from their point of view."

"We had better get started," said Pons.

"Let me call Rossiter."

The Chief Constable telephoned the station and gave instructions for the police to establish some sort of contact with Gerald Farway in London. "Just make sure he's there."

This done, we carried our bags down to the car waiting in front of the hotel. Sir Hugh's driver put our luggage into the boot, and within minutes we were on our way north out of Frome, the Chief Constable filling the first hour with speculation in a vain hope of persuading from Pons some clue to the identity of the murderer he proposed to name when we returned from our sojourn in Merioneth.

But the Chief Constable fell silent before we reached Gloucester, unable to move Pons, and did not resume his attempts until we stopped for lunch at Shrewsbury.

"You have all the facts," said Pons. "You need only put them together. And once you have assembled the evidence, you can go into court with it."

"What can you hope to turn up at old Fairlie's place?" said Sir Hugh.

"Have the police been there?"

"We saw no need for it. We still see no need for it. A murder done near Frome can hardly be sufficiently related to the dead man's cottage a hundred and fifty miles away. And he hadn't been there in over a month."

"Ah, well, I will concede that there may be no direct link between the cottage and the crime. Nevertheless, I intend to visit it. If I cannot turn up the evidence we need, then we will set down the lines along which the police must work at their routine assembling

of the necessary evidence with which to charge and convict the murderer."

Sir Hugh turned to me. "Have you no influence with him, Doctor?"

"None, I assure you. Pons pursues his own course. He has a horror of making an error."

"Tut, tut! We all make mistakes," said Pons airily, in the manner of one who made the least. "Someone's life might be at stake here and we owe it to all concerned not to act hastily."

That was Pons's last word. From Shrewsbury on he was engaged with the beauty of the Welsh landscape. Despite much development in the way of inns and hotels for the increasing numbers of tourists, many areas of Wales remained wild and striking to the eye. From Machynlleth we followed the river Dovey toward the coast for several miles, and from Towyn north to Llwyngwrl the coast itself.

It was not possible to reach Fairlie's cottage by car. We found it necessary to leave the car at a roadside path, and walk for half a mile into the hills to the cottage itself. Sir Hugh and his driver, carrying our bags, accompanied us, the Chief Constable growling and harrumphing.

Sir Hugh had obtained the key to the cottage—a tidy little dwelling of stone and wood, more substantially built than I had supposed, and obviously old enough to have been bought by Fairlie rather than put up by him. It stood partly up a slope with a precipitous path leading beyond it to the heights behind and to the north of it, and a sort of defile leading down to a narrow strip of sandy beach, broken here and there with great boulders.

The opening of the door revealed—as might have been expected—a neatly kept interior, roughly but comfortably furnished.

Sir Hugh looked cursorily around, walking into the four rooms that made up the single floor of the cottage.

"You're not on the telephone here," he said, as if he were making a formal charge against Pons's lack of foresight.

"Well, it is no problem to walk into Llwyngwrl," observed Pons, "when it becomes necessary to telephone. Fairlie obviously preferred his isolation to its possible interruption. I can appreciate his point of view."

"We'll expect to hear from you. If you let me know, I'll send the car for you."

"That is hardly necessary," protested Pons.

The Chief Constable went on briefly about his "responsibility" for Pons, and then at last bade us farewell and followed the driver back to his waiting car, manifestly disgruntled.

At once Pons reverted to his old self. He ignored the bags we had brought — one for each of us, into which at the last we had put the arms Sir Hugh had brought — and stood looking keenly around, his eyes darting from one wall to another, scrutinizing the furniture — chairs, a desk, a table.

"It is obviously Mr. Fairlie's domain," I said. "Everything is as neat as the proverbial pin."

Pons nodded. "But there is a drawer not quite shut on the right side of the desk, a curtain awry at one window — that to the right, some papers in disorder on the clock shelf. Would Mr. Fairlie have left the room so?"

"You aren't suggesting that this place has been searched, too?"

"I rather think it has. In more leisurely fashion. There was no need for haste here. I submit that while we were looking for a murderer in Frome, he was here looking for evidence against him."

"How can you say so?" I cried.

"Not a document, I suspect," continued Pons. "But anything Mr. Fairlie might have left in writing to incriminate him. Even down to such casual notes as he might have made — as we saw at Farway Hall."

"Evidence," I said. "Of what? Surely not of his own murder!"

"Come, come, Parker," he said, not without impatience. "Evidence concerning some kind of criminal act, patently. Fairlie alive was dangerous to someone, and it was necessary not only to remove him but also anything he may have set down about the inquiry he was conducting."

"Surely this is made up of the flimsiest cloth," I said. "There is little evidence to act on."

"But enough. And there is not the slightest evidence of anything other to afford motive for his murder." He crossed to the desk, as he spoke, and pulled out the drawer. "Yes, there is some disarray here. Someone has been through these papers — not, I submit, Mr. Fairlie, who would have left them in a neater arrangement."

"What are the papers that remain?"

"Some letters." He opened one as he spoke to look at the signature. "They are from his daughter." He returned them to the drawer, unread. "Some pages of an account; they appear to be of

tax computation. A list of supplies needed—doubtless for repairs he intended to make here. Nothing of importance. And, of course, there is nothing to show whether anything was taken."

Thereafter Pons examined the cottage thoroughly, room after room, inside and out, while I unpacked our bags. When he had finished, he came back in and suggested that we follow the path to the beach.

"This is undoubtedly the path taken by Ronald Farway on that fatal night," mused Pons, as we made our way along the defile, which, though steep in some places, was not long.

It opened out on the beach, which was here so narrow a stretch of sand as to be virtually under water at high tide. At the moment, however, the tide was out, and the sand sloped steeply away toward St. George's Channel. Gulls flew low over the water along the edge of sand, crying out in their companionable voices. Far out, a blue haze lay over the sea. To the north, in Barmouth Bay, several small vessels were visible, but too far away to be identified as more than fishing or pleasure craft. Great rocks jutted up out of the sand, as had they at one time become detached from the rocky hill reaching upward from the beach, and fallen there, to become lodged in the sand and washed in ever more firmly by the tides.

There were no prints in the sand, other than those we made, and those of the gulls that had but recently walked there.

"It would be a challenge to swim here," I said.

"Would it not!" agreed Pons. "And how much more of one to risk even greater danger here!" he added enigmatically.

"You refer to Ronald Farway's accident?"

"We have been told it was an accident," said Pons reflectively. "The woman who was with him so reported it. He went out to swim by moonlight—he never came back. Does not that strike you strangely?"

"Not at all. The sea does not always give up what it takes."

"Or what it is given," said Pons cryptically. "But let us move in the other direction. There is a lane that leads up to the crests. I submit it is the wisest course to follow to familiarize ourselves thoroughly with the terrain. We shall be out in it to encourage him. An accident is easier to simulate up there." He pointed uphill. "We shouldn't want another drowning here. The repetition might arouse suspicion, eh?"

"You harp on that drowning," I said. "Why?"

We began to climb back up the defile.

"Young Farway was either drowned or he was not drowned," said Pons.

"That is a most elementary premise," I put in.

"Agreed. If he were not drowned, his failure to turn up proved embarrassing to the young lady—Gerald Farway's fiancée, though the accident evidently ended their engagement. If he were not—let us pursue this matter a trifle longer—his disappearance lacks any discernible motive. Can you suggest one?"

"Easily," I said. "He may have struck his head on a rock or something of that sort and suffered a loss of memory. Perhaps even of identity. He may have turned up down the coast in some backwater."

"And kept hidden in the face of the search for his body?" put in Pons. "Well, that is possible, but highly improbable. He had everything to gain by turning up alive, everything to lose by drowning."

"But suppose he deliberately vanished because he had more to gain by doing so—more than we have yet turned up?"

"That is an interesting speculation," agreed Pons, "but we have so far nothing to justify it."

We had now reached the cottage and attained the lane that led uphill beyond it. This was a steeper climb, and it was patent that the lane was little used, for it was partly overgrown. In some places it skirted dangerously close to the edge; in others it meandered inland, climbing steadily.

Our course gradually revealed a long undulating ridge of mountains, evidently part of the Cader Idris range; indeed the high peaks of the Cader Idris itself could be seen far inland, almost due east of our position, but a little to the north; while before us the rolling mountains ranged toward Fairbourne and along the Mawddach inland to the east, toward the County Town of Dolgelley. To the west lay the blue waters of the sea.

We were now perhaps three-quarters of a mile from the cottage, and at the top of the rise there. Pons, who had been walking ever more slowly, came at last to a stop at a point where the lane bent almost to the rim of the sharp declivity there. He peered over the edge, and saw below the sea dashing against rocks at its base.

"Here, I should think, is the perfect spot for an accident," he said thoughtfully. "There is a rock formation that offers concealment on the east side of the path. A sudden rush here upon an unexpected traveler, and he would be dashed to his death below."

I shuddered. "How can you speak so calmly of it!"

"Put yourself in the place of the murderer," Pons went on. "Would he not come to a similar conclusion? Can you see a better spot? We have passed none as suitable for the purpose of an accident as this."

"When is it that you expect him to come?"

"If he comes. I expect an attack tomorrow night. He will need to study our habits before he makes an attempt. We may suppose some familiarity with the place on his part. I shall make it a practise to walk out to this point and stand here to view the sea several times this evening and tomorrow. Let me see, there will be a moon this evening, if I am not mistaken but in any case, the starlight is sufficient."

"Unless the sky is overcast," I said.

"It is clear enough now."

The sky was indeed clear, though the sun was now low and would soon set. None but a few flocculent clouds along the western rim were to be seen in all the heavens; the night promised to be clear.

"I think the idea mad, Pons," I said.

"It is just mad enough to succeed."

"How can you be sure *he* may not succeed?"

"I cannot. But forewarned is forearmed. I will not be taken by surprise." He gazed ahead. "We need go no farther. This point will suit our purpose as well as any we might find. Moreover, it is not too far from the cottage. Let us return."

We walked back down toward the cottage. I was perplexed at Pons's assurance that an attack on him would be made. He seemed not to doubt it. His "If he comes" had been merely perfunctory. He had convinced himself that his challenge would be accepted.

When we reached the cottage, I could remain silent no longer. "Pons, why are you so sure that he will come?"

"I am familiar with the pattern of his crimes."

"Crimes?" I echoed.

"Crimes," said Pons without elaboration. "Let us brew a cup of tea and take some nourishment."

"I confess to some uneasiness," I said.

Pons laughed almost heartlessly. "Ah, the hunting instinct is less strong when one is in the position of being the quarry. There is really no difference between hunting a stag, let us say, and a human being, except that, in the latter case, the odds are less

great—particularly when the quarry expects the hunter. This fellow has a singular vanity."

"It takes as much to set one's self up for his quarry," I said.

"*Touché*," answered Pons.

"Then he must already be somewhere near."

"I should think it mandatory. If he means to study the lay of the land and our habits on it, he must have at least a day in which to do it. The sun is going down now. I fancy we are safe for the night except for the possibility of fire."

"You cannot mean he might fire the house?"

"Well, it is within the range of possibility," said Pons, as if he were discussing some event remote in place and time. "And if you don't mind, we'll take turns on watch tonight."

So it was at taking turns watching that we spent the night. I myself took the first watch, saw the moon go down, and the evening stars—Jupiter and Saturn—following westward, moving from one window to another in the darkness and peering out into the landscape, which lay under the faint glow of starlight after moonset, a glow that would have enabled me to see only someone silhouetted against the sky. I saw and heard nothing, not so much as an owl, and though, for a while after Pons took my place, I was unable to sleep for thinking of the possibility of a nocturnal attack, I did presently drift off.

Nothing untoward happened in the night, and all that next day, Pons walked the paths at given intervals—to the beach once or twice, but most often to the heights, where he stood out against the sky, visible, I was certain, for miles, a lean, solitary figure, for he went alone save for one occasion when I walked with him. He was tense with expectation, and explained twice that he was anxious to be back in London, and had taken this "extreme measure" in the hope of bringing the problem to a rapid solution. But for the most part he was taciturn, preferring the silence to speech.

At our spare evening meal, Pons announced that he expected an attempt to be made during the dusk hour. "Putting myself in his place," he explained, "I would consider that my last and best opportunity. The light will be right. The vista to the west—with moon and planets over the sea and afterglow, would certainly attract the eye of any walker along the lane and so divert attention from anything else. A sudden rush—a skilfully planned push—and all would be over. It would have the look of an accident, par-

ticularly if he took time to crumble away part of the edge at that point in the path."

I then tried seriously to dissuade him from his rash plan, but he would not be moved. Indeed, he rather looked forward to it, and there was a certain deviousness in his manner I did not understand until later. When he set out on that final walk along the heights, he clapped me on the back and bade me a reassuring farewell.

"What am I to do?" I asked.

"When once I have reached the top," he replied, "it might be well if you came along as far up the path as possible without showing yourself. You are not visible from the top for at least half the way. Anyone concealed up there — and I expect our friend to be there — would not be able to see you. His attention will in any case be concentrated on me and, seeing me come alone, he will conclude that you are remaining behind."

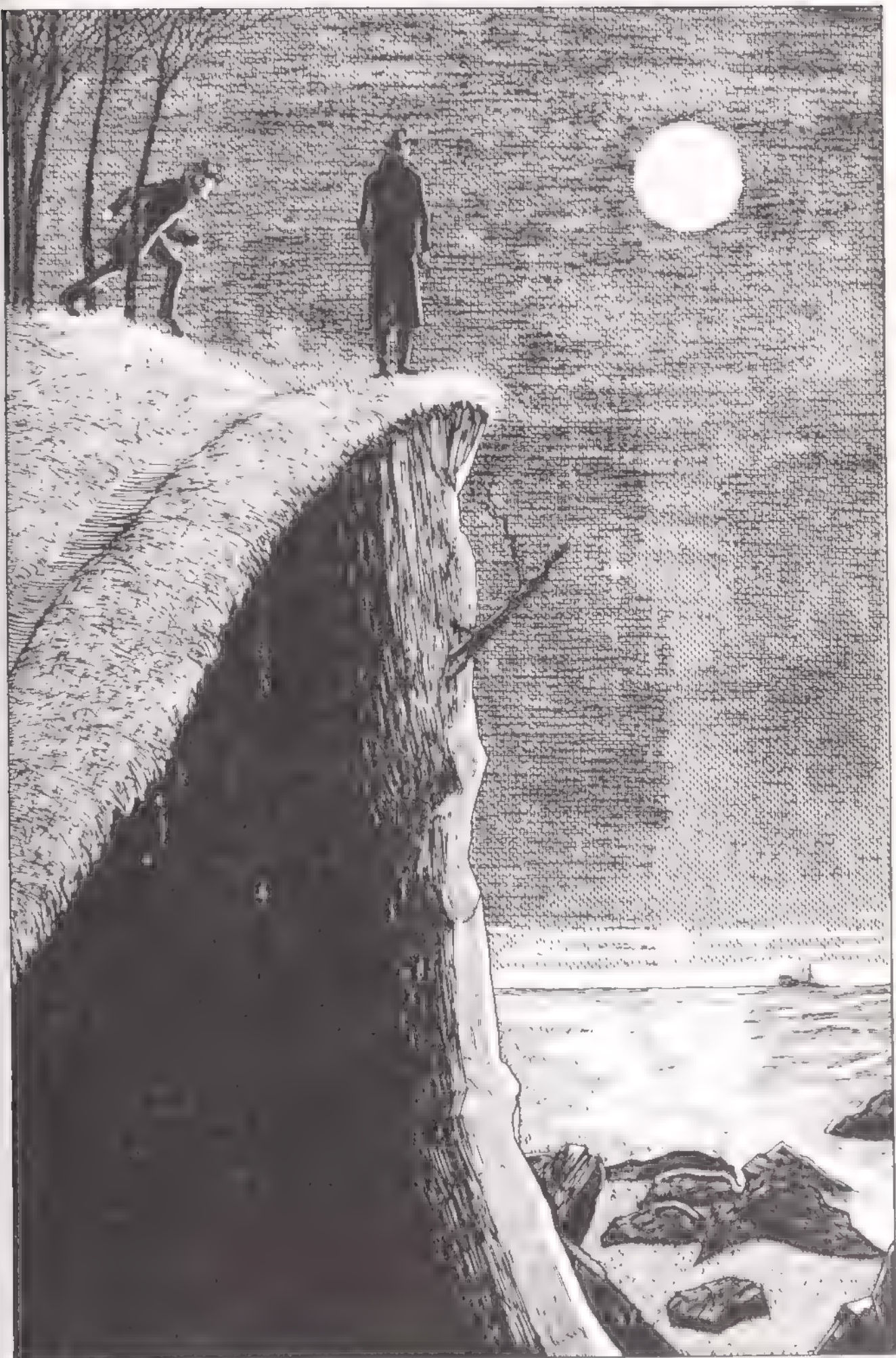
"You never think he might anticipate you," I cried.

Pons chuckled. "His concern is with murder — not its thwarting."

I watched him go with a heavy heart. The sun was now well down, the waxing moon shone, the evening star was visible in the heavens, and so, too, stars of the first magnitude. A smouldering afterglow still lay along the western rim, as if great fires burned far below the horizon and cast reflections of the flames up on the smoke-like clouds that lay there, just within sight; but on the surface of the earth now dusk was closing in, and Pons was a dark figure moving up the lane toward a foreseen assignation I hoped would never take place.

In but a little while I followed cautiously, leaving a light burning behind me, so that if anyone were to look down — supposing that anyone were to come far enough from the crest to see — he might be misled into thinking the cottage occupied. Pons was out of sight when I started up the lane, and by this time almost all the afterglow had faded save for a single band of smoky old rose; only the light of the moon illumined the lane, though it was adequate to guide me, even though I was not as familiar with the lane as Pons, who had walked it at least a dozen times in the course of the day.

I had just come within sight of him — standing at the place he had chosen, looking out into the west, the moonlight showing on his aquiline face — when there came hurtling out of the darkness behind him a black shape, bearing directly toward Pons. I meant to cry out, but before I could raise my voice, Pons, alert to the attack, had moved toward him, and instantly the two men were grappling



there. Pons's advancing to meet his assailant was clearly designed to move the struggle away from the point, but the force of their meeting inevitably carried both to the very brink - and there they stood, grappling almost soundlessly.

I ran forward, climbing toward them, my heart beating wildly, praying that Pons had not miscalculated.

I had almost reached them when one of them went over the edge with a wild, anguished cry - and then, merciful heavens! - the other tottered and fell! I flung myself forward, seeing him half on the one side of the point, hanging over the edge, half on the other - and grasped one hand, and then the arm, and pulled back with all my might.

Slowly, between his endurance and the strength I mustered, born of dire necessity, Pons came back up over the edge and sprawled for a moment there, breathing hard. It was the other who had gone over.

"A near thing, Parker," said Pons, heavily, as he sat up.

"Are you hurt?" I asked anxiously.

"No, no - only a scratch or two and a bruise perhaps - and my natural vanity is a trifle shaken. No more." He got to his feet, his breathing becoming more regular, and said, "We shall have to go down at once - the tide, I think, is out far enough to permit our walking along the edge."

The journey back down the lane, past the cottage - where Pons paused only long enough to light a lantern which was among the effects left there by Mr. Fairlie - and down the rocky defile to the beach took half an hour; and the sand beyond was still wet, but Pons walked ahead, eager now, unmindful of the wetting of his shoes - and mine.

And at last we came upon his assailant, sprawled like a bundle of clothing among the rocks at the base of the precipitant slope, one hand outflung into the sea that washed gently at it, soaking his coat past his elbow. Pons held the lantern high.

"There he is," said Pons - "the murderer of Ronald Farway and Jonas Fairlie, and, unless I am sadly mistaken, of Austin Farway and Peter as well."

The man who lay there was ruddy of complexion, like a countryman, with a thick shock of black hair, bushy eyebrows, and a natty moustache. His clothing, too, was flashy, if dark - of plaid, in brown hues, with black and tan and dark grey in it.

"Your show, Parker," said Pons, stepping aside.

It needed only a cursory examination to know that he was dead. "Neck and back both broken," I said, "as well as one leg." I stood up. "But I have never seen this fellow before."

Pons handed me the lantern. "I think you have, Parker. Let us have a closer look at him."

He leaned forward and tore away the moustache the shaggy eyebrows—the dark hair: a wig.

An involuntary cry escaped me. There lay before us none other than young Robert Farway!

"And now," said Pons, "the amenities of the situation must be observed—the local police—a trunk-call to Sir Hugh, and all that. Come along, Parker—he is safely lodged until the police get here."

"Robert Farway!" exclaimed Sir Hugh as we rode back into the dawn toward Frome. "I cannot believe it even yet! Why, he was himself attacked!"

"That was his fatal mistake," said Pons. "If at that point I had had any serious doubt about his guilt, I would have lost it at once, because it was apparent that the murderer had revealed his master design. Jonas Fairlie was only an incident in it—his real quarry were the members of the Farway family. I daresay Peter was his first victim—a murder committed on the spur of the moment, out of the necessity imposed upon him by the impending marriage which would forever remove his uncle's wealth from his grasp. It is perhaps not easily capable of proof at this late date. And it may be that Peter's death was a genuine accident, and that that accident put Robert in mind of the result that might be attained if the remaining heirs were removed.

"He clearly had a penchant for the contrived accident—I cannot believe that Austin Farway's death was caused by a genuine accident—or that Ronald Farway died in any other way but that of Robert's hand—Robert, who swam out after him and drowned him in the sea."

"But how could he know that Ronald would be at Fairlie's cottage? Hrumph! It's entirely too fortuitous."

"Obviously someone informed him."

"Ha! but who?"

"I fancy it was his sister."

"Rebecca?"

"She could surely have written him—not with the intent of preparing him to commit a crime, but simply to relay gossip common enough to the household."

"And Fairlie — what about him? How did Robert come to be here at the moment Fairlie set off for London?"

"He made it his business to be. Fairlie's nosing about at Glasgow and Edinburgh perhaps word of his traveling to Wales — information about questions the old man had asked — all these certainly put the wind up him, and he decided that Fairlie had to die. He couldn't know how little actual proof Fairlie had managed to disclose. I daresay your men will be able to trace Farway's movements easily enough — at least, his absences from his work, which will certainly coincide with the time that Austin, Ronald, and Mr. Fairlie died." He shrugged. "Like so many clever criminals, once challenged, he lost a little of his self-assurance. He couldn't know Fairlie was bound for 7B. He couldn't know that Fairlie had only suspicions — profound, to be sure — but nothing tangible enough with which to go to the police. He believed that this might have been the case, no doubt, but he couldn't afford to take the chance that he might be in error; and once an official inquiry began, his absences from Edinburgh would surely come to light."

"And all simply to increase his inheritancel!"

Pons nodded. "He was in a fair way to collecting most of Sir Charles's wealth. Small wonder he was so genuinely solicitous for his aunt's health. Once her death took place Sir Charles's wealth would have been divided and he would lose all opportunity to expand his share. He moved with care — Austin, then Ronald — and Jill was marked as the next victim. With suitable intervals between."

"How can you know that?"

"I took the number of that little car she rented — a habit of mine, gathering up all kinds of knowledge, most of it useless. That car was involved in a near fatal accident two days after she returned it. I saw the account in the papers. The police verdict was that it had been 'tampered with.' You'll recall Robert's firm refusal to ride to London with her. That tampering was done at Frome, but Robert miscalculated."

"Monstrous!" cried the Chief Constable. "But how did he manage to get around?"

"In these days, Sir Hugh, cars are ubiquitous. No one notices them. He could drive down from Edinburgh and back without anyone's taking notice of his car."

So it went for mile upon mile, with the Chief Constable putting in questions and Pons answering them. Neither of them had slept through the night, nor had I — but at last I could stay awake no

longer and fell asleep to the hum of the motor and the sound of their voices.

IX. THE SECOND SECRET

Back at the George I woke only long enough to go to our quarters and get into bed, leaving Pons and Sir Hugh still talking below. I slept soundly until noon, when Pons's hand at my shoulder brought me awake.

"Come, Parker, we have still one small mission to perform," he said. "We'll expect to take the 4:39 for London."

He was listening to the wireless as I rose to dress. The news of Robert Farway's death was out, and the circumstances of it, and Pons listened to the wireless account with a wry smile, for credit for solving the mystery of Jonas Fairlie's death was now as surely being given to the local police and Sir Hugh Parrington, as two mornings ago the promise of that solution was credited to Pons.

Pons turned off the wireless. "I have sent Sir Hugh on an errand, and expect to meet him at Farway Hall. We have an appointment with Lady Farway at one. There is time for something to eat, if you like."

"I want nothing," I said. "I'd prefer something on the train, if you don't mind."

"Then let us set out for Farway Hall. We have time enough to walk, and I rather fancy walking."

"You have had enough of it in the past two days!"

"I never have enough of it. And I have a sentimental fondness for these old market towns. Who knows but that Frome under another name might not have been the setting for a scene in a novel by Thomas Hardy, whose 'Wessex' lies little more than a half hour away."

We made our way out of the George and down Bath Street to Christchurch Street West, Pons pausing from time to time to admire some ancient architectural feature, or the Parish Church of St. John the Baptist and the tomb of Bishop Ken – who pleaded in vain for the Monmouth rebels condemned by the Bloody Assize. As we walked along, Pons discoursed on the history of the area and the beauty of the countryside.

In this leisurely fashion we reached Farway Hall at one o'clock. Pons charged the butler to send word to Lady Farway's quarters when Sir Hugh Parrington arrived, and we were then shown up-

stairs by Rebecca Farway, whose eyes were manifestly inflamed with tears.

"How has Lady Farway taken this dreadful news?" asked Pons before Rebecca knocked at the old lady's door.

"It has been a terrible shock to all of us," said Rebecca.

"And to you," said Pons. "I am sorry it had to be."

"I understand. And I understand now, too, why Robert always plied me so with questions about all of us here. He wanted to know every little thing—especially after Uncle Charles died."

She knocked at the door, opened it, and looked in to say, "Mr. Pons and Dr. Parker are here, Aunt Ellen."

"Please send them in, Rebecca."

She threw the door wide and we went into the room. Rebecca withdrew behind us.

Lady Farway sat in a handsome Chippendale wing chair, making a commanding, almost regal presence. Her eyes, too, indicated that she had been weeping, and she still held a handkerchief in one clenched hand. But it was clear that she had reserves of strength invisible to her family.

"I regret the necessity of intruding at so trying a time, Lady Farway," said Pons, "but since we hope to leave for London this afternoon, we have little alternative."

"This has been a dreadful shock, Mr. Pons, a dreadful shock. I find it very, very difficult to believe even now."

"I fear there is no doubt of Robert's guilt, Lady Farway."

"Dreadful, dreadful," murmured Lady Farway, shaking her head.

"I am all the more regretful since I am afraid yet another shock cannot be avoided," Pons went on.

She looked at him with apprehension. "Surely I am not to be asked to endure more—after all I have been through?"

"There is no alternative, Lady Farway," said Pons firmly.

A knock sounded on the door, and Rebecca looked in, a baffling expression on her dark face. "Mr. Pons, Sir Hugh Parrington has arrived."

"In five minutes, Miss Farway. Sir Hugh will know the order." Rebecca withdrew, and Pons turned again to Lady Farway. "You will recall that mysterious and upsetting journey Sir Charles took with Mr. Fairlie two years ago?"

"I do, indeed. How could I forget it! It inaugurated all the events since then."

"And you may know that Sir Charles at that time changed his will and settled a sum of money on Diana Fairlie."

"No, Mr. Pons, I do not know that. But I am happy to hear it. Sir Charles knew he had treated her unfairly."

"Sir Charles had an experience you are now about to share. Will you brace yourself, Lady Farway?"

She looked at him with mounting uncertainty. "I have seen so much of death in the past two years, Mr. Pons, that nothing can come as a greater shock to me."

"I am not so sure," said Pons.

He turned toward the door and called out, "Now!"

The door opened.

But it was not Sir Hugh Parrington who came walking into the room. It was a small, very handsome little blond boy who could not have been quite seven years old. He came in diffidently, walked halfway across the room, and stood there looking inquiringly from one to another of us.

The effect on Lady Farway was extraordinary. She half rose from her chair, the colour draining from her face. Then she fell back, and a long, wailing cry came from her lips. And at the last a heart-rending, "*Peter!*"

Since that appeared to be the lad's name, he went directly to her side, and, after but a moment's hesitation, the old woman folded him into her arms, tears streaming down her face.

"This boy, Lady Farway," said Pons, "is the heir in whose favour Sir Charles changed his will. I am sure you know why. It was this he strove so hard to tell you at the time of his fatal seizure."

The resemblance between the boy and the portrait of the dead Peter Farway that stood on the mantel nearby was extraordinary.

The old lady fought for control and looked past the boy in her arms. "Is Diana here?"

Diana Fairlie, who had been waiting outside with Sir Hugh, came slowly into the room. She met lady Farway's eyes without flinching.

"Daughter," said the old Lady with great dignity. "Thank you for bringing my grandson home." She glanced toward Pons and added, "And thank you, Mr. Pons, for making it possible."

"The crux of the problem," said Pons, as we sat in the restaurant car of the train carrying us back to Paddington, "was the matter of motive for Jonas Fairlie's murder. Passion and primary greed seemed at the outset unlikely, so what remained was vengeance or

danger to someone in Fairlie's remaining alive. But vengeance seemed, on the face of the matter, improbable, for no one bent on vengeance would have cause to search the body or the quarters occupied by the dead man.

"It was not improbable that Fairlie was killed for the same reason that he intended to call at 7B—whether or not his murderer were aware that he was actually setting out for London to do so. Whatever the problem he intended to lay before us, it manifestly involved someone else. A mere matter of a threat of vengeance could have been handled by the local police. And, since Fairlie's entire life from adolescence onward seems to have been involved with the fortunes of the Farway family, it was not unreasonable to conclude that the problem in some way concerned the Farways.

"There was nothing amiss at the printing works—or with the financial affairs of the business; therefore the matter must be something of a highly personal nature—so personal, in fact, that Fairlie felt his loyalty to the Farways to be in challenge, and wanted to thrust the entire matter into my hands and so free himself of the onus.

"Somehow—by what means we cannot now know—Fairlie stumbled upon evidence that suggested foul play in someone's death—in all likelihood Ronald's. He began painstaking investigations, correctly assuming or soon coming to believe that the motive for Ronald's murder lay in the terms of Sir Charles's will, which divided the estate among his surviving nieces and nephews. He attracted Robert's attention and doomed himself, for Robert suspected, clearly, what he was about, and killed him, after which he destroyed every particle of writing that might pertain to the investigation Fairlie was conducting.

"In his haste, he did not tear away enough pages from Fairlie's writing-pad, as you know, and we were able to make out something of what he had jotted down there, even if I drew erroneous conclusions about those letters at the outset. When I saw them in their proper relation and meaning, however, then it was inescapably clear that Fairlie suspected some member of the Farway clan of having committed at least one, possibly more murders in order to increase his inheritance.

"There were, of course, certain obvious indications at once. Plainly, Robert had not intended to see the police called in—hence his care with the chloroform used to kill Fairlie, for only minimal burning of the skin was observed, as you noticed. But the use of

chloroform in itself suggested someone with access to it, and as the routine police inquiry continued and failed to turn up any source from which it could have come, Robert became the primary suspect. And then, rattled by the activity of the police, and motivated too by his desire to cover himself if something happened to Jill Farway—that motor accident he had planned for her—he made the mistake of fabricating that attack upon himself, after which he disposed of the disguise he had worn on the previous occasion, as we have seen.

"But his mistake lay in this—the attack on himself betrayed his own real motive—the plan to eliminate his cousins from the succession to Sir Charles's will; for until that point, no one had thought of murder directed against any member of the Farway family. I was certain that I could count on anyone who had committed so rash an error to find it impossible to resist the challenge I offered him at the cottage in Merioneth."

"But the will had been changed," I said.

"Yes, yes—of course, it had been changed. Miss Fairlie left Frome not out of anger, but out of pride and perhaps some shame—for the father of the child she carried was dead, and she could not bring herself to throw herself on the mercy of the Farways. Only her father knew of the child's existence—that was his second secret—and he ultimately, fortunately, took it upon himself to take Sir Charles to see their grandson.

"It is one of life's little ironies—those little ironies that never cease to move me to some sardonic contemplation of human endeavour—that all Robert Farway's careful planning was for naught, simply because he did not know of the existence of his young cousin!"

"And how did you know?" I asked. "I was as shocked and surprised as Lady Farway to see what was obviously her grandson walk into that room."

"Ah, that was the most elementary of all. You will recall the brevity of Sir Charles's new will—it suggested at once that the bulk of his estate was no longer to be divided—oh, undoubtedly some legacy was set down for each of the nieces and nephews—but to go to one person. That one could hardly have been someone less close to him than his brother's children. Our visit to Cheltenham confirmed it.

"Miss Fairlie had in her room a small peaked cap—plainly too small for her to wear, equally plainly a boy's cap. She also had

children's books true, of the kind that many adults enjoy—I myself among them. But she said she had once read *The Wind in the Willows* aloud. One hardly reads a book aloud to one's self, and that fine masterpiece by Kenneth Grahame is just precisely the kind of book to be read to a child.

"And then, of course, while we sat there on the Promenade, we saw the boy himself returning from his half-day at nursery school. Miss Fairlie was on needles lest we stay long enough to see him."

Pons looked out of the carriage window. His eyes were sparkling. "Here we are, Parker, if I mistake not, drawing into Paddington. It is good to be back in London. The countryside can be a murderous place at times."

The Adventure of the Golden Bracelet

"AH, PARKER," cried Solar Pons, as I walked into our old quarters at 7B, Praed Street one summer afternoon in 1939. "I see that your wife has gone on a holiday, and you have come to spend a little time with an old friend. That is not your customary medical case you are carrying."

"She's visiting her aunt in Glasgow for a week," I said, "and my *locum* can easily do without me for a few days."

"Capital! Capital! Put your bag in your old room, and share a pipe with me."

"Are you at leisure, then?" I asked, as I came back and took my former place at the fireside.

Pons chuckled. "You manage to time these occasional visits of yours with fine judgment. As a matter of fact, I am expecting a client." He bent and gave me a light, enveloping me in the smoke of the vile shag in his pipe, and then stood back once more in that familiar pose with one elbow on the mantel. "Does the name Simon Sabata mean anything to you?"

"That fellow is in all the papers, Pons," I cried. "He is notorious. I believe that questions were asked about him in the House yesterday, and the Government of Turkey is demanding his arrest on a charge of the theft of some of their national archaeological treasures. The evidence seems conclusive as to his guilt."

"Gently, Parker, gently. We have not seen any of the evidence apart from certain reproductions of drawings he has made."

"He has freely admitted making them."

"We have so far only read of the alleged evidence in the newspapers."

"The several pages of drawings—in colour—run by the *Tempest* two weeks ago would seem to be conclusive."

"Let us wait and hear his story," suggested Pons. "I fancy that is his car that has just drawn up to the kerb."

In the silence that fell I heard the slamming of a car door, the creak of the entrance below. The steps on the stairs were those of a man of more than ordinary light weight, for they were scarcely audible.

Our client moved swiftly, for his knock sounded before I expected it.

Pons opened the door to him.

"Mr. Pons? Thank God! I am at my wits' end," cried our visitor.

"Pray come in, Mr. Sabata. We shall today also have the counsel of my old friend, Dr. Parker."

Sabata acknowledged the introduction with only a frosty, distraught nod, and sank gratefully into the chair Pons had moved forward toward the fireplace. He was a short, slender, almost dapper man. He sported a greying Vandyke, and the marks on his nose clearly indicated that he wore pince-nez, which the black silk cord around his neck terminating in a pocket of his waistcoat only corroborated. He had singularly intent eyes, which, after his fleeting glance in my direction, did not leave Pons's face.

"I am sure you know why I have come, Mr. Pons," said Sabata. "Your brother was kind enough to make the appointment for me. It is a delicate matter – a very delicate matter, indeed."

"Let us forget the newspapers, Mr. Sabata," said Pons. "I would prefer to hear the story in your own words."

Our client took a deep breath. "I have given an account of it so frequently that I have come to doubt the evidence of my own senses," he said. "It began, I suppose, last April on the underground. I had spent the day at the British Museum, and had worked rather late, I got on to the Tube. . . ."

"At Russell Square—or Holborn?"

"Oh, Russell Square. Is that important?" He was manifestly impatient.

"Go on, Mr. Sabata."

"I got on and sat down. There were not many passengers, but a young lady followed me and sat down across from me. I could see that she was of foreign parentage, but obviously, judging by her ease of manner and her clothing, she had been in London a long time or was a British citizen. She was olive-skinned, dark-haired, and her eyes were very dark and well, yes, liquid. I should call it like the eyes of many Turkish women I have seen. Since she sat directly in the line of my gaze, I quite naturally studied her. I assure you I had not the remotest interest in her personally, for all that she was a very attractive woman, and I am sure I would have forgotten her quite readily had I not seen her bracelet."

He paused and shook his head, as if he were trying to clear his vision of some cloud. "Mr. Pons," he went on, "that young woman

wore a bracelet of solid gold. It was of a kind that is extremely rare. It has been found only at one place in the entire world—at Troy, by Schliemann. I had never seen such a bracelet outside of a museum, under guard.

"Mr. Pons, I am sure you must understand what such a discovery must mean to an archaeologist."

"Particularly to one of your reputation," said Pons dryly.

"Ah, but which reputation!" cried our client bitterly. "I now have several." He sighed and went on. "It seemed to me the most natural thing in the world to introduce myself to my fellow-passenger. Caution, discretion, the behaviour-patterns of a lifetime—all fell before that golden bracelet. She did not, however, take offense, and readily gave me her name—Sarah Sirit.

" 'I could not help noticing your bracelet,' I said to her. 'I hope it is not an impertinence to ask where you got it?'"

"She was very casual about it, holding out her arm and turning her wrist round, as women do. 'Oh, it is part of a little collection I own,' she said.

" 'Surely,' I said, scarcely concealing my eagerness, 'you do not have more like it?'"

" 'Six more bracelets, several other artifacts, and some figurines,' she said, as if she were talking of something she had casually bought from a diamond merchant.

"Mr. Pons, I almost swooned. When I had myself under control once more, I said, 'You must know it is priceless.'"

" 'I collect antiquarian pieces,' she said, quite simply, as if this were some trivial occupation in which she indulged in her spare time.

" 'Where on earth can you hide them?' I asked.

" 'I keep them at home,' she said, with some surprise.

"Well, Mr. Pons—to shorten my story, I was impelled to ask whether I could see the rest of her collection. She was reluctant, but I overcame her reluctance, and prevailed upon her to permit me sight of her treasures at once. So we went on past my station to Sudbury Hill, where we walked but a short distance to her home. She lived alone, and let us in with her latch-key. The house appeared to be sparsely but well furnished, and in very good taste, as I would have expected from the owner of such a treasure. I suppose that now, on reflection, I must concede that its furnishings were predominantly masculine—but I must not get ahead of my story.

"My hostess took her own time, which is consistent, as you may know, with the customs of the East. She served me Turkish coffee, and we made a considerable amount of small talk about archaeological subjects, of course, on which she was very well informed, knowing a surprising amount of data about my own excavations in Turkey and Greece - and in general establishing ourselves on a more friendly basis. But time at this point meant nothing to me; I was excited with the anticipation of what was to come, and presently she turned to a mahogany desk against one wall of the sitting-room and unlocked one of its drawers.

"There, neatly laid out on cotton wool from which the actual dust of the pieces excavated had not entirely been removed, were her treasures. She took them out, piece by piece, and placed them on the table before me. Mr. Pons, there were forty-seven pieces in all - a priceless collection. I have never seen its like outside of a museum in my life. I had, of course, seen greater but less rare collections in the course of my excavations - you will know how wide they have been - but these were extremely rare, for they were the first real proof of the Yortan culture, of which heretofore we have had only vague hints.

"I could scarcely control myself. I did not dare ask how this collection had come into the country. They were for the most part small pieces, which could easily have been smuggled in - bracelets, daggers, figurines in bronze, silver, and gold, armbands, anklets, cups - most of them in solid gold; too, as you very probably know, there is a considerable sale of antiquities on the part of the natives of the excavated areas - of pieces they have discovered, despite the attempt of the Turkish government to retain all the artifacts anyone uncovers - and all those I have uncovered have been turned over to the government for the national collection - but in the course of our conversation she offered this information herself, such as it was.

"The treasure had been taken from three tombs discovered near Mehmet - a village not far from the Sea of Marmara. By whom, she did not say, but the clear inference was that she and her brothers had taken part in the opening of the tombs. The pieces could not have been brought openly out of Turkey; so they must obviously have been smuggled into England. And certainly not all at one time.

"It was now well past midnight. I hope you will understand that I simply could not take my leave of this treasure. No Yortan tomb

had ever been discovered or opened to my knowledge – yet here before me lay indisputable evidence that it had been done, and we had at last proof of the existence of a sea-faring nation originating in Troy, living east of that city, sometime in the third millennium B.C.

“By this time, my hostess was patently tiring. I asked, finally, whether I might photograph her treasure.

“About this she was firm. I might not. ‘But you may sketch it, if you like,’ she said. ‘I have sketching materials.’

“‘Could I return tomorrow?’ I asked.

“Much to my surprise, she denied my request. ‘No, Mr. Sabata, it must be now – or never,’ she said. ‘I do not know how long I will be here.’

“Well, Mr. Pons, the upshot of it all was that I remained there overnight. She gave me a room in an alcove off the sitting-room, and the cabinet with the treasure in its drawers was not out of my sight save for the time I slept – and that was a very short time, indeed, for my excitement did not abate sufficiently to permit much sleep. And I remained there for three more days and nights – studying and sketching that superb collection, making rubbings – until I had reasonably good representations of every piece in her possession.

“I then asked whether I might publish my drawings.

“‘Oh, no,’ she said, with some agitation. ‘It cannot be done.’

“Of course, she would say so if the collection had been smuggled out of the country. Though she was out of reach of the Turkish authorities, there might be members of her family in Turkey who could be reached.

“‘Without mention of your name or address,’ I said.

“Well, we talked back and forth, and I overcame her reluctance to the extent of gaining her promise that, if I had not heard from her in three months, expressly forbidding me to publish my drawings, I might do so.

“When I left the house before dawn the next morning, I was as elated as I have ever been in my life. I had seen something archaeologically unique, a treasure I had dreamed some day of seeing but not actually believed I would ever have the good fortune to see – dreamed of seeing piece by piece as I discovered it in my explorations – and seen at last not in the ancient soil of Turkey but in a house in Sudbury Hill!

“Of course, I need hardly say that I expected every post to bring

me a curt letter forbidding me to publish my drawings, and it was not until two months had passed that I began to hope that I might be permitted to publish them. And then, as you know, in the end, no letter came though I waited ten days longer than the three months she had specified. And then I published.'

He groaned and covered his eyes.

"Pray continue, Mr. Sabata," said Pons softly.

"All the world knows the rest of my story," cried our client bitterly. "Within a week the storm broke. Those pieces were identified beyond doubt as having been stolen from a treasure trove acquired by the Turkish government—a trove of which no display had ever been made—and my drawings had been so precise as to make identification positive. Understandably, representations had been made to our government, and within hours gentlemen from Scotland Yard and the Foreign Office visited me.

"I had no alternative but to tell about my adventure, to give them Miss Sirit's name and address. I had no hesitation, in the painful circumstances, in accompanying them to Sudbury Hill, and led them directly to the house.

"But, Mr. Pons, no Sarah Sirit had lived in that house, according to the owner—a Mr. Leonard Harwood, whose father had built the house. No one but Harwoods for two generations had ever lived in it. Yet it was unmistakably the house in which I had spent three days and four nights; I could identify every piece of furniture, in every room in which I had been. I needn't tell you that the cabinet drawers contained not a trace of those priceless pieces—not even so much as a thread of cotton wool! Mr. Leonard Harwood had never heard the name of Sarah Sirit and plainly looked upon my tale as a fabrication. I am afraid the police took the same view, and unhappily for my reputation, so did the Turkish government—my permit to renew my explorations in that country has been canceled."

"Mr. Harwood, I take it, was abroad during the month of April?"

"Yes, he was!—in America," said our client eagerly. "That is the one feature that has given the police pause—though Harwood scoffs at the idea that anyone could have lived in his home during his absence, since he found nothing out of place. But I fear this is all academic—my reputation is ruined. I should never have published my drawings without the pieces to offer as evidence. It is all so baseless!"

He gazed at Pons almost in desperation. "Mr. Pons, if there is

anything you can do to discover the treasure, you may name your own fee no matter what it is—I shall not question it. Can you undertake it?"

"I shall do my best, Mr. Sabata."

After our client had taken his departure, Pons sat for a long minute in silence, an errant smile on his thin lips. At last he turned to me, his smile broadening. "What do you make of it, Parker?"

"I thought it a preposterous tale," I said.

"Oh, it is preposterous enough," agreed Pons. "But it is certainly true."

"How can you be so certain?"

"Because no sane man would willingly connive at the destruction of his own reputation," he replied. "In these little matters, Parker, such an account is either true or not true; in this case there can be no doubt of its truth. Someone meant to harm Sabata and succeeded."

"Ah, it is a case of vengeance."

"I submit it is."

"Why not simply hire a thug to assault or kill him?"

"You touch upon the essential point, Parker. Sabata was intended to be hurt in his field, where he has until now been highly respected. I submit that every step of this little plan was carefully worked out. Miss Sirit did not take the same train or enter the same compartment by accident. No, it was planned that she would do so, and Sabata's every movement was watched. Someone intended that Sabata should not go back to Turkey to continue his explorations—that his permit to dig be publicly canceled under the blackest kind of cloud."

"And the discovery of the treasure elsewhere will restore his reputation," I said.

Pons shook his head. "Refurbish it, perhaps—but not restore it. For a charge of this kind to be made in itself does the primary damage. The truth will never catch up to it. The whole tale is so fantastic as to seize hold of the imagination, and nothing thereafter will diminish it. In matters of a man's reputation, it is only necessary that a charge be made for, once made, an indelible impression has been created and it can never be entirely erased." He paused and gazed thoughtfully toward the ceiling. "How did you assess our client, Parker?"

"A vain man."

"Nothing more?"

"And certainly an impulsive one. Only a man of impulse would have taken such a course as he set forth to us."

"I daresay."

"And indiscreet," I went on. "How could a man of his reputation have been so thoughtless as to spend three days and four nights in a house with a young woman whose acquaintance he had made but an hour before?"

"Ah, a man driven by passion—whether it is for gold or women or fame—recognizes no bar," observed Pons.

"Someone must have been very familiar with his habits."

"I rather think Sabata has been under surveillance for some time," said Pons dryly. "He would not have noticed it. It would have required elaborate preparations; they were made. Whoever laid this trap for Sabata knew his man well enough to know he could not resist the bait. The house in Sudbury Hill had to be got ready, and this involved the transportation from some other point of the priceless treasures Sabata saw there."

"I suppose there is no doubt that he saw them?"

"None. His drawings are explicit enough to have enabled the Turkish government to make positive identification of the pieces. What does all this suggest? Come, Parker—you have been familiar with my methods for a long time—what do you say?"

"It is plain as a pikestaff that only someone with at least as much knowledge of archaeology as Sabata must have been consulted," I said.

"Capital! I am delighted to see that you have lost none of your powers since your marriage."

"But surely he must now come forward as a result of all this publicity!"

"Must he, now?"

"He could hardly have missed seeing it."

"And enjoyed every word of it," said Pons, chuckling. "Surely it is obvious that only a fellow archaeologist would have devised so ingenious a revenge! Indeed, it is highly improbable that anyone else could have done so."

"No other archaeologist would intrigue to so harm his own reputation!" I cried. "You said as much of Sabata."

"Unless he had already lost it," retorted Pons. "I think a little

inquiry into Sabata's career might not be amiss. Such a man has certainly made enemies—any small success breeds them, and a man of Sabata's temperament, cursed with vanity and impulsiveness, is bound to have made more than the average. Let us just make a brief foray into the files at the Museum. They will certainly have a file on Sabata."

Within the hour we were deep in that venerable mecca for scholars from all over the world. Despite its ever increasingly crowded facilities, the Museum did indeed have a dossier on Simon Sabata who, it quickly emerged, had been embroiled in more than one intemperate episode, as the headings of the newspaper cuttings Pons scanned revealed—"Sabata Assails Peguy" "Sabata Challenges Colleague's Findings" "Archaeologists' War of Words" "Corum Refutes Sabata's Claim" "Sabata Accuses Corum"—and so on, one upon another.

"This fellow seems to surface only to quarrel with someone," I whispered.

Pons's eyes danced. "Does he not, indeed!"

"He must have a dozen enemies to every friend."

"Ah, I fancy this is what we want." He sat back with a cutting dated three years previously.

"Archaeologist Retires Under Cloud" read the headline, and the first paragraph told the story: "Nathaniel Corum, the well-known archaeologist whose discoveries in Turkey were successfully challenged by Simon Sabata, who wrested from him the government of Turkey's permission to head a new research venture in that country, announced his retirement today. Discoveries in the area of Mehmet were proven to be spurious by Sabata."

"Sabata seems to be anything but an engaging fellow," I said as we traveled back toward Praed Street on the underground.

"I fancy he is not much loved in or out of his profession," said Pons dryly.

"He seems to have sown discord whenever possible."

"All to his greater glory."

"With no concern as to the feelings or reputation of his victims."

"'Victims' is the word, Parker," agreed Pons.

"He has been acting all along like a dog in the manger."

"Indeed, he has," agreed Pons.

I came at last to the crux of what I meant to say. "He is not, I should say, exactly my idea of a desirable client."

"He does indeed leave much to be desired," said Pons. His eyes twinkled. "That is an opinion in which I am certain Nathaniel Corum concurs."

"How can you be sure that Corum is implicated in the plot against Sabata?"

"I fear it would be asking too much of coincidence if he were not," said Pons. "Consider—he is an archaeologist, he has reason to hate Sabata, he excavated near Mehmet, he lives in Sudbury Hill. Now, surely, it would be a most extraordinary coincidence indeed if two men with such qualifications were to be found in any given area of London at the same time. Not impossible, admittedly, but improbable. But apart from these factors, there is one other, even more important—only someone like Corum could have got his hands on the pieces Sabata recognized and sketched, and of all the archaeologists who came under Sabata's attacks, only one other, the German, Thielmann, excavated in Turkey."

"Why not Thielmann, then?"

"Thielmann has been dead two years," said Pons. He shook his head as if to shut off any further protest. "No, it cannot be anyone other than Corum. He is the author of the little drama, and his friends or servants acted it out, with Sabata as the unwitting star."

"And Harwood?"

"Undoubtedly another unwitting actor. He may have been known to one of Corum's accomplices, and so, too, his plan to visit America. It would have been a simple matter to take a wax impression of a door key. Nothing else was needed. And some care was taken to arouse no suspicions in the neighbourhood of Harwood's home—you will have noticed that Sabata reached the house late at night, and left before dawn."

"But the antiquities—the pieces Sabata saw!"

"Oh, there is no question but that they were stolen. Perhaps by Corum himself. Perhaps by Turkish thieves who sold and smuggled them to him one at a time."

"Well, it proved to be an elementary matter after all, despite so promising a beginning," I said. "I suppose all that is left to do is notify the police and have them call on Corum with a search warrant."

"I rather think not," said Pons, with a little smile. "We shall use another tactic that may do as well."

"Surely you are not again going to burgle a house!" I cried.

"No, no, Parker. This matter calls for more finesse. I fancy a direct confrontation is in order. We shall call on Nathaniel Corum this evening."

Nathaniel Corum lived in a rather large house in a small park-like area of land in the western reaches of Sudbury Hill. A pair of antique oil lamps glimmered yellowly in the darkness on either side of his door.

Pons lifted the knocker and sent a loud knock reverberating in a hall beyond.

We waited for a long minute before the door was opened far enough for a servant to put his head out.

"Yes?" inquired the head of what appeared to be a greying man in middle age.

"We wish to speak with Mr. Nathaniel Corum," said Pons crisply.

"Mr. Corum sees no visitors," said the head.

The door began to close.

"One moment," said Pons, putting a firm foot against the closing door. "I think he will see us. Pray take him my card."

He took a calling card from his pocket, added my name to it, and wrote something across the back.

A black-clad arm emerged from the darkness of the hall beyond the door, and a fat hand took the card from Pons's fingers. The arm withdrew. The door closed.

Within moments it was thrown open. The arm and head proved to belong to a rather tall, oversized man who was at the moment acting as butler, but had the appearance of being a general factotum.

"Come this way, gentlemen," he said.

He led us down the hall into a large room lined with bookshelves. At a table beside a reading lamp sat a man past middle age, for his hair was thinning and his thick beard was iron-grey. He regarded us out of unfriendly dark eyes. In one hand, I saw, he clutched Pons's card, and it was obvious that he had crushed it in anger and only afterward straightened it out. "You may go, Talbot," he said to his servant, then turned to us.

"What is the meaning of this, sir? How dare you! 'It is either us or the police.' What insolence. I warn you, Mr. Solar Pons, tread carefully. I am familiar with your reputation."

"And I with yours, Mr. Corum—before and after Simon Sabata."

Corum's face grew white with rage. He crumpled Pons's card once more and threw it to the table. For a few moments he fought

for control; then, his chest heaving, he cried, "That is a name I have never permitted to be mentioned in my presence."

"But surely, after what has befallen him, you can hear it with less agitation," said Pons, smiling.

Corum's rage visibly cooled as he sat looking up at Pons, who still stood challengingly before him. "He deserved it," he said savagely, and a grin of malicious glee distorted his features. "He deserved it."

"I have no doubt he did," said Pons. "And it was very artfully done, too, if I may say so."

Corum's eyes grew wary.

"And now that you have had your sport with him, I have come for the Yortan treasure, Mr. Corum."

Corum threw himself back in his chair and gripped the arms. "Incredible!" he cried. "How have you the insolence . . . ?"

"Come, come, Mr. Corum—it won't do, it won't do at all. It will not take the police much longer to reach the same conclusions I did. There is surely only one man in all London who could have accomplished Sabata's downfall—you alone had the means to do so. Once the police move against you, they will never cease hounding you until the treasure is in their hands and presently on its way back to Turkey. Now that you have accomplished your end in Sabata's ruin, the treasure has plainly become too dangerous for you to hold. Surely it would be better found in Sabata's hands, than in your possession! At the moment, the police are of two minds about Sabata's story—once he produces the treasure, they will never believe it."

A succession of emotions chased one another across Corum's face—indignation gave way to wariness once more, wariness faded into craftiness, and presently he was eyeing Pons as if he saw him in a new light.

"You could hardly expect me to jeopardize myself, Mr. Pons."

"Your name need not come into it."

"How is that possible?"

"Unless of course you want the satisfaction of having it publicly known that you brought about Sabata's downfall."

Corum brushed this aside. "Mr. Pons, you may not believe it, but those pieces by means of which Sabata snatched my commission from me and ruined my reputation were placed among my findings by Sabata's agents."

"I believe it," said Pons.

"Yet you are employed by him?" Corum spoke scornfully.

"My instructions were to find the treasure," said Pons. "I have

none beyond that. I have agreed only to 'discover the treasure' and he has agreed to no more on his part. It does, after all, belong to Turkey, and the Turkish government has begun to make angry representations to our government. I am confident that you know the meaning of this. The treasure has now become, as our American cousins put it, 'too hot' for you to keep—whether you yourself smuggled it out of Turkey or whether you bought it is immaterial."

"How is it possible to keep my name out of it?"

"Anything is possible for me, Mr. Corum. It is not so for the police."

Corum came to his feet. He crossed the room to a bell-pull and tugged at it.

Within moments, a door at the far end of the room opened, and a dark-eyed, olive-skinned young woman stood at the threshold.

"You rang, Mr. Corum?"

"Have the Yortan pieces brought to me, Ana."

She turned at once, closing the door softly behind her.

Corum came back to the table and sat down. He said nothing. Pons and I continued to stand in silence. Corum put one hand on the book he had been reading—a new work by Henry Williamson—as if he meant to take it up again, thought better of it, and withdrew it.

The door at the rear opened again, and Talbot came into the room carrying a rectangular chest. He brought it to the table and put it down before Corum, who signaled him to leave the room once more.

"Come closer, Mr. Pons," said the archaeologist.

He opened the chest. There before us lay some of the antiquities our client had sketched in a house that was not more than ten streets from the place we now stood.

"There are two other layers beneath," said Corum. "These cases lift out, as you see." He lifted one, as he spoke, disclosing another strata of the Yortan treasure. "They are all here." He replaced the case again, and closed the chest. "The chest, too, is a fine piece."

"It will be returned, Mr. Corum."

"Pray accept it with my compliments, Mr. Pons. Like the treasure itself, I bought it in good faith. It, at least, was not stolen from the government stores."

"You had not known the source of the Yortan treasure, Mr. Corum?"

"No, sir. Not until I read the account of Sabata's disgrace in the

papers I thought it taken from a tomb excavated by the natives—a common source of antiquities of this kind. Can I have the car brought round to take you home?"

"We have a cab waiting, thank you, Mr. Corum."

Our client presented himself next morning at ten, in response to a telephone call from Pons.

"You have good news for me, I trust, Mr. Pons," he said as he entered our quarters.

"Ah, well," said Pons, his eyes dancing, "there is an ambiguity in that, Mr. Sabata. Good and bad are relative matters; they depend upon more than the perspective of the individual, is it not so?"

"Hm!" said our client ungraciously.

"Pray be seated, Mr. Sabata."

"I am a busy man, Mr. Pons," said our client brusquely, as he sat down.

"I am happy to see you have quite recovered from your despair of yesterday," said Pons.

"I am trying to put the best face on the matter," said Sabata. "But it is difficult—very difficult."

"Perhaps," said Pons, lifting the cover of the chest on the table, "this will help a trifle."

"Great Scott!" cried Sabata, leaping to his feet. "The Yortan treasure!"

He went quite pale and caught hold of the table to control his trembling.

"Forty-seven pieces, I believe you said," Pons went on. "It is all there."

"Where did you find it?" demanded our client.

"In Sudbury Hill."

"Impossible! The police searched that house from top to bottom."

"I am sure they did," said Pons.

"I will have that fellow Harwood charged!" cried Sabata. "I will break him for the dastardly scheme!"

"Breaking people seems to have been a pastime of yours, Mr. Sabata. Nevertheless, I would not advise you to have Harwood charged."

"Why not?" Our client thrust his face at Pons's like that of a diminutive bulldog.

"Because Harwood did not have the treasure in his possession. He has never seen it. He knows nothing about it."

"You said so!"

"On the contrary. I said only that I found the treasure in Sudbury Hill. That is my last word on the subject."

"I demand to know where you found it!" cried Sabata.

"I agreed only to discover it. I have done so. I agreed to nothing more."

A baffled expression locked itself to our client's face. "Surely you are not going to deprive me of the satisfaction of turning it over to the police?"

"Not if you insist upon doing so."

"Then I will take it and go. Just send round your bill, sir."

"Not so fast, Mr. Sabata," cried Pons, with one hand on the chest.

Sabata threw his arms across it, as if fearful of losing it. "I will take it now—directly—to Scotland Yard."

"Not before you have given me a receipt for it."

"Such quibbling, when my reputation is at stake!" cried Sabata angrily, as he wrote out the receipt for which Pons had asked.

Then, clutching the precious chest to him, he walked with quick, nervous steps from our apartment, bound for the police.

"If you have any pity in your heart, Parker," said Pons before the echo of our slammed door had ceased to sound, "pray spare a little of it for Simon Sabata. He is going off in white heat to hang himself."

And so it proved in the days to come, for despite Pons's admission to the authorities that he had tracked the treasure to earth at the behest of Sabata, the majority of the editorialists in the daily papers—and no doubt the majority of readers as well—left no doubt, without exposing themselves to legal action, of their belief that Simon Sabata had been in possession of the treasure from the beginning.

"Seldom is revenge so sweet," said Pons at our next meeting. "Nathaniel Corum must be hugging himself with glee! Sabata's ruin was inherent in his nature, and Corum knew how to draw it out."

Appendix

*The Adventure of the Snitch in Time**

ON AN AUTUMN afternoon of a year that, for manifest reasons, must remain nameless, there came to the attention of my friend, Mr. Solar Pons, a matter which was surely either the most extraordinary adventure ever to befall a private inquiry agent in or before our time, or an equally extraordinary misadventure, the *raison d'être* of which remains obscure even now, though it might have been born in the circumstances of the moment, for it was one of those days on which London was literally swallowed in a yellow fog, and we had both been confined to our quarters for two days, with no more incident than the arrival of an occasional paper and the unfailing complaint of our long-suffering landlady about Pons's spare appetite.

Even our warm and comfortable quarters, for all that a fire burned at the hearth, had begun to pall on us. Pons had exhausted the microscope; he had abandoned his chemistry experiments; he had ceased his abominable pistol practise; and for once there was not a single item of correspondence transfixed to the centre of the mantelpiece by his knife. He had hardly stopped his restless wandering among the disorderly order of our quarters, and seated himself in his velvet-lined chair, holding forth on the points of difference between Stradivarius and Amati violins, when he rose once more with his empty pipe in his hands.

He was at the fireplace, about to take the shag from the toe of his slipper, tacked below the mantelpiece, when suddenly, he paused. He stood so for a moment, in utter silence, his hawk-like face keen with interest, his body seeming actually to lean forward as if to catch the sound that smote upon his ears.

"If I am not mistaken, Parker," he said with unaccustomed gravity, "we are about to have a most unusual visitor."

I had been standing at the window looking out, and had just turned. "Nothing has disturbed this fog for the past half hour," I protested.

* With Mack Reynolds

"My dear Parker, you are looking in the wrong direction. The footsteps are approaching from out there, and a little above."

So saying, he turned to face the door with alert expectation in his grey eyes.

I had for some time been conscious of a curious sound, almost as of water sliding at regular intervals against the roof. Apparently this was what Pons had mistaken for the sound of footsteps. Almost at the same moment of this realization, a most peculiar assault was made on the door to our quarters. I had not heard the outer door; in truth, I had heard no step upon the stair. But now a kind of brushing sound broke in upon us; it began at the top of the door, and did not become a recognizable knock until it had descended to mid-panel.

Being nearest the door, I moved to open it.

"Pray be cautious, Parker," said Pons. "And spare me your alarm. Unless I am in egregious error, our visitor is from another world."

I gazed at him, mouth agape. I had heard and marveled at his extraordinary deductions before, but this came from his lips with such calm assurance that I could not doubt his sincerity even while I could not accept his words.

"Come, Parker, let us not keep him waiting."

I threw open the door. There, confronting us, was a strong, healthy man, bronzed by the sun, clad in a fantastic attire of such brilliant hues as to dazzle the eye. His footgear—a strange combination of sandal and slipper—must have made the curious slapping sounds I had at first mistaken for the dripping of water, but which Pons had correctly identified as footsteps, however alien to our previous experience.

Our visitor looked briefly at me and said, "Ah, the famous literary doctor, I presume?" and smiled, as if in jest.

My astonishment at this manner of address, accompanied as it was with an almost insolent amusement, left me momentarily speechless.

"Come in, come in, my dear fellow," said Pons behind me. "Pray overlook Dr. Parker's rudeness. I perceive you have come a long way; your fatigue is manifest. Sit here and relieve yourself of the problem which brings you to these quarters."

Our visitor walked into the room, inclining his head to acknowledge Pons's invitation.

"I hope you will forgive my coming without an appointment," he said, in a somewhat stilted voice, accompanied by florid and Victorian gestures. "I fear I had no alternative. Let me introduce myself. I am Agent Tobias Athelney of the Terra Bureau of Investigation, Planet Terra, of the Solar System League."

Pons's eyes twinkled merrily.

"My dear sir," I could not help interrupting, "levity is all very well, but this is neither the time nor the place for it. Just where are you from?"

Our visitor had taken the seat to which Pons had waved him. At my words, he stopped short, took a small, violet-covered notebook from an inner fold of his robe-like costume, and thumbed through it until he found the place he sought.

"Pray forgive me," he murmured. "If we were still using your somewhat fantastic calendar system, it would be the year 2565 A D."

Pons, who had been scrutinizing him closely, now leaned back, closed his eyes, and touched his fingertips together. "So you represent yourself as a governmental agent of almost 700 years in the future, Mr. Athelney?" he said. "A traveler in time?"

Our visitor grimaced. "Not exactly, Mr. Pons. To my knowledge, there is no such thing as time travel, nor can such travel ever be developed. No, the explanation for my presence here is more elementary. We have recently discovered that the universe is not, indeed, one, but of an infinite number. We have learned that everything that possibly *could* happen *has* happened, *will* happen, and *is* happening. Given an infinite number of alternative universes, you can easily understand how this would be so. To illustrate, Mr. Pons, there are alternate space-time continua in which Napoleon won at Waterloo; there are still others in which Waterloo was a draw; and there are yet others in which the battle was never fought at all — indeed, in which Napoleon was never born!"

I flashed a glance of mounting indignation at Pons, but my companion's face had taken on that dreamy expression I had learned to associate with intense concentration. Surely it could not be that he was being deceived by this patent mountebank!

"Infinite other universes than this," murmured Pons, "containing other persons identical to myself, and to Dr. Parker, here, who carry on their little lives in much the same manner as we do?"

Our visitor nodded. "That is correct, Mr. Pons. There are still other space-time continua, in which there are no such persons as

yourselves, never have been, and never will be." He coughed almost apologetically. "In fact, in this multitude of alternate universes, Mr. Pons, there are some in which you two are fictitious characters, the product of a popular writer's art!"

"Amazing!" exclaimed Pons, adding, with a glance at my dour face, "and yet, not entirely incredible, would you say, Parker?"

"Preposterous!" I answered. "How can you sit there and calmly accept this—this nonsense?"

"Dear me," murmured Pons, "let us not be too hasty, Parker."

"I am sorry to have upset Dr. Parker," said our visitor soberly, "but it is from just such a universe that I have traveled to this. Approximately 700 years before my birth, in my space-time continuum, a series of stories dealing with Mr. Solar Pons and Dr. Lyndon Parker were written, presumably by Dr. Parker, and became the all-time favourites of the literature of deduction."

"Let us assume all this is so," said Pons. "For what purpose have you come?"

"To consult you, Mr. Pons."

"I fancied as much," said my companion with a serene smile. "Though it would seem a long chance indeed to consult a fictitious character."

"*Touché*!" answered our client. "But a fictitious character in *my* universe and 700 years before my time. But in *this* universe you are very real indeed, and the greatest detective of all time!" He sighed. "You cannot imagine, Mr. Pons, the difficulty of first finding a continuum in which you were *real*, and then, on top of that, one in which you were contemporary."

Pons sat for a moment in silence, stroking the lobe of his left ear. "I submit," he said at last, "since patterns of crime and its detection continually evolve, you are haunting the wrong continuum, Mr. Athelney."

"I think not, Mr. Pons, if you will hear me out."

"Proceed."

"One of our most scientifically advanced bands of criminals is named the Club Cerise, after the favourite colour of its leader, Moriarty. They—"

"Moriarty!" exclaimed Pons.

"Yes, Mr. Pons. Moriarty. The name is familiar to you perhaps?"

"Indeed it is!" Pons was silent for a moment, his eyes closed. "You know, Parker," he said after a moment, "I have always felt that one

death at the Reichenbach was as false as the other." He sat up in his chair, his gaze now intent on our visitor. "Pray continue, Mr. Athelney! Where my illustrious predecessor could achieve but a stalemate, it seems that you offer me the opportunity for complete victory!"

"Well, then, Mr. Pons," our visitor resumed, "you will not be surprised to learn that Moriarty and his band have managed to escape retribution for some time, and it is in regard to their apprehension that I seek your assistance. The criminal method they have developed is based on the same discovery that allows my presence here. Moriarty and his Club Cerise have been making a practise of invading space-time continua in less developed eras than our own, and, utilizing our most advanced weapons and devices to assure their escape, have been despoiling these universes of their art treasures. Not long ago, for example, they went into a twentieth-century universe and obtained a Da Vinci, a half-dozen Rembrandts, and a priceless collection of Kellys."

Pons's eyes widened a trifle. "You are suggesting that the Irish have developed an artist of the stature of Da Vinci, Mr. Athelney?"

"Indeed, yes. A fellow named Kelly created a work of genius called *Pogo*, which appeared in hundreds of newspapers of his day. These were *Pogo* originals, including some of the very rare pre-strip drawings. With his fabulously valuable treasure, Moriarty and his band managed to return to our own space-time continuum. Obviously, we cannot punish them in our universe, since they have committed no crime there. Under ordinary circumstances, it would be possible to extradite them to the universe they plundered—but there are almost insurmountable complications."

Pons smiled, still giving no evidence of being in the slightest troubled by the mad, ingenious, account of our prospective client. "I daresay 'insurmountable' is the word to describe the problems attendant upon extradition of a group of criminals from a country which doesn't exist in the universe where the crime was committed. I submit that a twentieth-century nation might be compelled to adopt extraordinary protective measures—if indeed these would be adequate—to deal with criminals seven centuries in advance of the police of that period." But now he shook his head, with a gentle smile on his thin lips. "But we must stop considering these ramifications, or we shall soon find ourselves involved in the higher mathematics of space and time."

"The importance of the problem is greater than might at first be evident," continued our visitor. "Given continued success on the part of Moriarty and his Club Cerise, there can be no doubt that other such bands will soon emulate them, and that eventually endless numbers of space-time pirates will give up other pursuits to devote themselves to the plundering of weaker continua with this type of snitch."

"Snitch?" I repeated.

"Elementary, Parker," murmured Pons impatiently. "Obviously idiomatic for 'theft.' "

"The ultimate possibility will not have escaped you, Mr. Pons," continued our client. "Sooner or later, the increasing numbers of criminals would arrive in *this* space-time continuum and in *this* era."

I could not be sure, but it seemed to me that at this suggestion a little colour drained from Pons's cheeks. And, if a shudder went through that lean frame, he was again under perfect control within moments. He sat then in silence, his eyes closed, his head sunk to his chest with his fingertips gently tapping together.

Our visitor waited in silence.

Pons opened his eyes presently and asked, "Pray tell me, Mr. Athelney—do you have income taxes in your world?"

Athelney groaned. "My dear fellow, last year my taxes were unbelievably high. Bureaucracy runs rampant!"

"Capital, capital!" exclaimed Pons. "Why not prosecute Moriarty for tax evasion?"

Our visitor shook his head dolefully. "The criminals of our days are advanced, Mr. Pons. They *pay* their taxes."

Once again Pons retreated into silence, taking time now to light up his calabash. But this time his silence was broken more quickly.

"I have some modest knowledge of British law, Mr. Athelney," said Pons, "but your laws may well differ. What type of social system prevails in your world and time?"

"It is usually referred to as Industrial Feudalism."

"I am not familiar with the term, though I can guess its meaning. Pray elucidate."

"In the same manner that Feudalism evolved from Chattel Slavery, and Capitalism from Feudalism, so Industrial Feudalism has evolved in our continuum from Capitalism. Ownership has contracted until a few princes of finance, a few industrial barons

and lords of transportation, completely control the government and practically all the wealth."

"Do national boundaries still prevail?"

"Terra is united, but we have loose ties with the other planets of the Solar System."

"Then doubtless you have tariff laws between the various planets."

"Very rigid ones. Last month we apprehended some Martians smuggling duppl berries; they were given ten years."

"I submit you have an obvious trap in which to take Moriarty and his Club Cerise, Mr. Athelney. They must pay import taxes on those art objects. Failure to do so puts them afoul of the law."

Our client smiled broadly. "I do believe, Mr. Pons, you have arrived at a solution of our problem."

He came to his feet.

"I suggest your government pass such tariff restrictions as to make imports from other space-time continua prohibitive. Such a move, in view of the fact that the criminals of your time are so advanced as to pay their taxes, would in all likelihood prevent further depredations."

Though our client was manifestly anxious to be off, he hesitated. "I wish there were some way in which I could remunerate you, Mr. Pons. Unfortunately, we do not use the same system of exchange. All I can do is offer profound thanks in the name of my continuum."

"There is surely remuneration enough implied in the promise that we will not be victimized here in our time and world by such as Moriarty," said Pons. "But, stay, Mr. Athelney—I perceive you are still troubled by some aspect of the matter."

Our client turned from the threshold, to which he had walked. He smiled wryly. "I fear, Mr. Pons, that this is but the initial step in our problem. Moriarty, when he learned I was to travel hither in search of the greatest detective of all time, took certain protective measures. He sent one of his own men to another space-time continuum to acquire the services of a most astute lawyer named Randolph Mason."

"Pray be reassured," responded Pons instantly. "I can refer you to a rising young contemporary, who promises to be even greater, and is gaining a challenging reputation in the legal circles of his world. By an odd coincidence, not uncommon to fiction—he beats a

similar family name. His given name, I believe, is Perry. My correspondents on the west coast of the United States have given me flattering reports of his talents. You will find him in Los Angeles, I believe. I commend him to your government. Good-afternoon, Mr. Athelney."

As soon as the door had closed behind our visitor, I turned to Pons. "Should not one of us slip after him and notify the authorities of his escape?"

Pons walked to the window and looked out into the fog. Without turning, he asked, "You thought him a lunatic, Parker?"

"Surely that was obvious!"

"Was it, indeed!" Pons shook his head. "I sometimes think, Parker, that that happy faculty for observation which seems to come so readily to me encounters obstacles of demoralizing stubbornness in you."

"Pons!" I exclaimed hotly, "you cannot have been taken in by this — this mountebank and his hoax?"

"Was he both lunatic and mountebank, then?" asked Pons, smiling in that superior manner which always galled me.

"What does it matter which he was? He was certainly one or the other."

"If a mountebank, what was his motive? If a lunatic, how did he find his way here in this fog, which is surely as thick as any we have ever had? I fear some of us have an unhappy tendency to dismiss the incredible solely because it is incredible to *us*. Tell me, Parker, have you ever contemplated setting forth in the form of fiction these little adventures of mine in the field of ratiocination?"

I hesitated to answer.

"Come, come, Parker, it is evident that you have."

"I confess, I have thought of it."

"You have not yet done so?"

"No, Pons, I swear it."

"You have spoken of your plans to no one?"

"No."

"Our late client spoke of you as a literary doctor. 'The famous literary doctor' were his exact words, I believe. If he were but a lunatic or mountebank, as you will have him, how came he then to know of your innermost hope and ambition in this regard? Or is there some secret communion between lunatics and mountebanks? I perceive, thanks to our Mr. Athelney that, without regard to my

wishes, you are destined to become a literary man at the expense of my modest powers."

"Pons, I swear I have never put pen to paper," I cried.

"But you will, Parker, you will. May I remind you of my distinguished predecessor's credo, that when all probable explanations have been shown false, the improbable, no matter how incredible, alone remains? This, I fancy, is one little adventure you will not be able to chronicle without a furtive blush or two."

In this, at least, my companion was correct.

*The Adventure of the Ball of Nostradamus**

MY FRIEND SOLAR PONS, the private inquiry agent, has a tendency to be highly dubious of all coincidence but was it only coincidence that he should refer to the singular adventure of the late Abraham Weddigan on the very day that I had determined to set down the facts about this horrible affair which shocked a continent and, on its successful termination, brought Pons the profound gratitude of millions of people as well as the personal felicitations of His Majesty? From the moment of its conclusion, Pons began to entertain some doubt about Abraham Weddigan, that strange, unforgettable monster - a description of my own which Pons will not countenance - and soon his doubts grew, so that often, when I saw him sitting in profound and troubled thought, and knew no problem had come in to enlist his keen mind, I was aware that he was once again pondering the meaning of the motives of Abraham Weddigan.

On that day in the 1920s that Pons entered the case, in the second decade of our sharing his quarters at Number 7B, Praed Street, I had been reading about the murder of a child - the second in the streets of London. Pons was standing at the window, his long thin hands clasped behind his back, his eyes fastened on the street below.

"I observe that you, too, my dear Parker," said Pons suddenly, without turning, "have begun to wonder - not without some indignation - about the child-murderer in our midst."

"How could you know which account I was reading?" I asked in surprise.

He turned, his ascetic face briefly alight with a smile. "My dear fellow, surely it is elementary. You are agitated, you rustle your paper indignantly, you squirm your disapproval of the police methods in the case, indeed, you all but snort in irritation. What else in the morning paper could stir to such indignation a man who has always been interested in the crime life of London?"

"Ah, you have read of it then!"

* With Mack Reynolds

"You know my habits, Parker. Little escapes me."

He came over to stuff his pipe with shag from the slipper tacked to the mantelpiece, and sat down in his favourite chair, a frown on his high forehead.

"I fear I neglected to tell you," he went on, "but I am expecting our friend Jamison at any moment. He sent word by messenger this morning before you awoke that he wished to see me on the matter, and it is now some minutes past the hour set for his arrival. Since he is customarily so prompt, I fancy some new facts may have come to light."

"Or another child murder," I put in.

"God forbid! This shocking chain of child murders is far more extensive than Inspector Jamison may know." He listened a moment and added, "But there is the police car now, if I am not mistaken, arriving in Jamison's usual haste."

The outer door opened and closed violently, and Jamison came up the stairs as rapidly as his rotund bulk would permit.

"Dear me," murmured Pons, "I would far rather Jamison glum than Jamison in such good spirits."

I opened the door to Jamison and saw that he was indeed in good spirits, for a broad smile sprang into being on his chubby face, his eyes twinkled, and his moustache fairly trembled with delight at sight of us.

"This time, Pons, we have done it without you!"

"My congratulations! But what is it you have done?"

"We have our man for the murder of Terence Allen and Thomas Kanczeny."

"The child murderer!" I cried. "I thought the crimes clueless."

"Ah, so they were," Jamison went on, rubbing his hands together. "We did not set out to arrest Captain Martin Verne for murder—we went only to question him."

"Pray begin at the beginning, Jamison," interrupted Pons patiently.

"Very well. I need not go into detail about the crimes themselves: you are familiar enough with the shocking shooting down of two defenceless children on the city streets. We have been interested remotely, it is true—in the activities of Captain Martin Verne—"

"One-time soldier of fortune, gunrunner, assassin for hire, last heard of in Morocco, after some years in Nicaragua, in China, and on the Continent," said Pons.

"That's him. Well, Pons, he's our man. When he came to

England three months ago, he was living close to the bone. We knew as much, and spread the word that the Yard was interested in Verne. So one day he moved from the hole he lived in down Wapping way, set himself up in Park Lane, no less, new wardrobe, and new night life all the more expensive restaurants and theatres. An informer passed us the word, and two men went over last night to ask him some questions. Verne must have suspected they were after something else. He tried to put them off, then he tried to shoot his way out. He put a bullet into Police Constable MacEachern's shoulder, but Constable Leeds put him out with his truncheon. Leeds hit him harder than he ought to have done, and Verne died half an hour ago. But not before we got down what he said in delirium; and when we had him conscious for a little while before the end, and put it to him: did he kill the children? he admitted it. Further, the laboratory tests show that a bullet from his gun killed the Allen boy: no bullet was recovered in the case of Kanczeny. So there we are."

Pons had listened with keen interest. Now, however, his eyes darkened, his frown returned. "And the motive?"

"He had no time for that. Still, we thought it might be in what he said. You see, the moment they heard him talking, they started taking down what he said. I wasn't called in until after I'd sent word to you. One look at what they'd taken down, and I knew Verne was our man. I brought along a copy of it for you, Pons. You've done me a good many favours in the past."

He took a folded paper from his inner coat pocket as he spoke and handed it to Pons. It was hardly the size of an ordinary sheet of manuscript paper and was, as I saw when I rose and walked over to look from behind Pons, little more than a meaningless jumble of disjointed sentences. Nevertheless, Pons read it with the keenest interest, though for my part I failed to see that Verne's utterances in delirium conveyed anything of signal importance. The typescript was commendably short.

"Terence Allen, aged 9 . . . Escape tutor . . . the ball knows . . . saviour o' the world . . . That damned fortune-teller! . . . two hundred gross of Brens . . . Look, sir, it's a bit out o' me line . . . first the smoke, then the picture . . . Christ! how real it is . . . Bloody old Mussolini! . . . Thomas Kanczeny, Hungarian legation, seven years old . . . mad dog, mad dog, mad dog . . . Gentlemen, we aims to quarantine, if you please, to prevent . . . blast him forever! putting the blood o' kids on me hands! . . . A pound never

looked better to me, and that's the truth, so help me God, but I didn't bargain for that kind of blood money . . . Guns you ordered and guns you got; I'll look at the colour o' your money . . . Touch the ball, Mister. Fifty quid to have your fortune told. Knows all, sees all, tells the future, tells the past. Fifty quid, Mister . . . My alibi's perfect. Nobody can touch me but me . . . And if I wasn't so bad off for money, I'd never take on a dirty job like this . . . Guns is my line, sir, guns and contraband. I'm the best."

Pons looked up, his eyes fairly dancing.

"Couldn't have made it clearer in a signed confession," said Jamison, smiling happily. "We know the Allen boy was shot when he ran away from his tutor. Now, just to corroborate, we've sent a man out to discover whether there was a dog at or near the scene, plainly enough in evidence, when the Kanczeny boy was killed."

"And how do you plan to establish the connecting link with — let us choose at random — the death of little Ossip Ciciorka in Prague four months ago?" interposed Pons quietly.

Jamison's mouth fell agape. His joviality faded; he grew wary. "Of whom?" he asked finally.

Pons repeated the name and added, "Or, for that matter, of Georges Murat, aged ten, in the rue d'Auseil, Paris, on May ninth last year; of Giovanni d'Orsini, aged eight, on a holiday in Naples two years ago; of Timor Gushenko, aged six, on the beach of Cannes with his parents three years ago; or even of the abortive attempt on the life of Ana Rabinsohn, a girl of five, in the streets of Bucharest six years ago."

Jamison had recovered his composure. "Pons, you are joking. And an ill-conceived joke it is," said he.

"I daresay you would think so. I regret that it is no jest. I have never been more in earnest. Let us pause for a moment and examine into the matter. There are striking parallels I believe you cannot fail to apprehend. In neither the Allen nor the Kanczeny case was any attempt to kidnap made."

"No."

"Nor to collect blackmail from the parents of these unfortunate victims."

"No."

"Nor was there any molestation of the children themselves."

"No."

"In both these instances murder alone would seem to have been the object of the attack."

"Quite so. It was in all the papers."

"The pattern is precisely similar to their Continental predecessors. All are unsolved crimes. And, of even greater importance, they are seemingly without motive. Or did you discover in the last hour with Verne any trace of one?"

Jamison flushed.

"Ah, you need not answer. I submit, then, that Verne had been hired to commit at least these last two crimes. He may have had a hand in some of the others, but I am inclined to doubt it. Very well then. If not Verne, some other hired assassin. They abound in Europe; each has his price, and most may have been less squeamish than Verne. I put it to you that no one pays a hired assassin to murder a child without some motive, however obscure. No, do not say it, Jamison—the psychopath does not pay to have murder done; he does it himself. We must cast into other waters for our motive, Jamison."

"When word of Verne's death reaches whoever it was who hired him, I'll wager he'll leave London by the fastest means," said Jamison.

"Dear me, I had not thought that Scotland Yard was less intent upon the capture of a murderer than his flight beyond their jurisdiction. I fancy that concept of crime detection will interest the Commissioner."

"Oh, come, Pons, you are taking me too literally. Depend on it, we shall be on the watch for him. But, I confess, we have not the slightest hint of motive."

"I suspected as much," said Pons dryly. "But the picture is not so hopeless as all that, surely. There are several salient facts which are curiously similar in the majority of the murders."

"You believe that those you have mentioned are connected with these in London?"

"Can you doubt it? Consider: the methods in all cases are exactly similar, and so are the circumstances surrounding them. There is a sinister pattern in the very fact that there is no similarity whatsoever unless we are unable to see it—among the victims of this plague of murder. Those children come from all walks of life. Allen was the son of a poor labourer. Kanczeny belonged to parents in the Hungarian Embassy. Ciciorka was the son of a Polish librarian. Young d'Orsini, though of an ancient Italian family, was the son of an artist. Murat of a wine merchant, Gushenko of a petty railroad

official. And the abortive attempt in Bucharest was made on the daughter of humble Jewish parents.

"Murder of children for vengeance against the parents is not unknown: it was practised at one time by the Maffia. But it is highly unlikely that these murders have a common origin of that nature: they are too widely separated to make it probable that one terror organization could be responsible for these crimes, and to presuppose others is to enter the realm of pure conjecture without relation to facts. None of the parents involved is important enough to have incurred political enmities. Indeed, they are nonentities — even Kanczeny's position at the Embassy is that of a minor clerk. In almost every instance, the children were murdered at a supremely felicitous moment for the murderer — when they had strayed or run away, which suggests either a constant watchfulness or an uncanny knowledge. I venture to suggest that all these crimes were the work of one guiding genius."

"A Napoleon of crime," cried Jamison.

"You do Napoleon's memory no service. A modern Herod, perhaps." Pons made an impatient gesture. "But we are wasting time. I beg you to stand by, Jamison. I mean to find the author of these crimes."

When Jamison had gone, Pons turned to me. "If you were to need the services of a fortune-teller — surely one of position, who asks 'fifty pounds' a reading — to whom in all London would you apply?"

"Elementary, my dear Pons!" I cried. "There is surely but one such seer: the consultant — so he terms himself — visited by peers, M.P.'s, even persons close to the Court — Abraham Weddigan. His fees are exorbitant, and he is never at a loss for patrons."

But Pons was already looking into a London directory. "Let us see. Ah, here we are. His office is in Southampton Row. Let us lose no time. We shall start with him. If we are in error, we shall carry on from there. None knows to what lengths he may be driven now that his hireling is dead."

"Are you not taking the delirium of a dying man too seriously?" I inquired when at last we were in a cab rolling toward Southampton Row.

Pons sat in his accustomed pose, head sunk to his chest, the fingers of one hand toying with the lobe of his right ear, his eyes clouded and dark, fixed on a point not in space but in time.

"No, no," he said impatiently. "I submit that the last words of Verne, however disjointed, nevertheless pointed clearly to some baleful connection with a fortune-teller. 'That damned fortune-teller!' he said. And twice more, he made reference to 'the ball' which surely is the crystal globe so much an integer in the impedimenta of the seer. We are quite safe in eliminating the references to guns and gunrunning; these would be bound to show up in such a scattering of memories as the situation implies. I submit we are on the right track. 'Fifty pounds' for a reading. No small sum. No crossing of the palm with mere silver. No indeed. 'Fifty pounds' and for that someone who knows all and sees all will tell the past and the future. Verne had become obsessed by him and by the magic ball to such an extent that a rudimentary conscience made him try to flee when, in actuality, none pursued him, and so brought him to his death."

Abraham Weddigan's suite of offices was in one of the most modern buildings in Southampton Row, one given over to business offices representing some of the foremost industries in all England. There, as sedate as any other, Abraham Weddigan was duly listed as a Consultant, and his suite was no secret.

We mounted to his floor, found his number, and were prepared to knock when the door was opened noiselessly from within. There before us stood a Caucasian of dark complexion, a Mauritanian, surely. He wore a turban and complementary clothing. He bowed.

"Mr. Solar Pons and Dr. Lyndon Parker. Step this way, if you please, sirs. The Master is expecting you."

"We made no appointment," I said with asperity.

"The Master knows all save his own fate," said the Mauritanian. "Such is as it was ordained."

He led us down a short corridor to a wide door at its end. There he stood, his head bowed, making no sound.

Nevertheless, a voice from within called out, "Enter."

The Mauritanian threw open the door and stood aside for us to enter a large, almost unfurnished room. In its centre was a low divan; opposite it, a conventional but luxurious easy-chair. Between chair and divan rose a small round table of oriental manufacture, supporting a small crystal ball. The occupant of the chair came to his feet and motioned to the divan.

"Mr. Pons, Doctor Parker—pray be seated."

His hands were fine and soft, as delicate as a woman's; his eyes were deep and lustrous, his grey hair was heavy and worn long, the

only factor of his appearance that seemed affected, for his dress was conventional—a grey business suit. He was a compelling, extraordinarily handsome man, however old he might have been. As he resumed his seat, Pons and I sat on the divan.

"We came. . . ." began Pons, but Weddigan held up his hand for silence.

"I regret the nature of your call. I regret the circumstances which have brought it about. The children, yes. The crystal told me Verne was not efficient. Now he is dead before my work in London is finished. Shall I go elsewhere to pursue it? I cannot say; the crystal is dark, very dark."

"Do you now confess to having compelled the man Verne to murder two defenceless children?" I demanded.

"Gently, gently, Parker," admonished Pons, laying a restraining hand on my arm. "We shall listen to Mr. Weddigan."

Weddigan inclined his head. "Thank you, Mr. Pons. Fate has implacably determined that we must be opposed to each other. I regret that circumstance. I know you will hinder my plans. How shall I speak of them to you?" An expression of great weariness came into his face, and he shook his head slowly from side to side. "Have I any other course? I think not, gentlemen. I hope and pray that you are not of the race of doubters and the army of the Philistines. I have the gift of true precognition." He laid one hand on the crystal ball before him. "All the myths of mankind, gentlemen, have a root, however remote, in fact—even the dream of seeing man's future in a crystal ball. This is no ordinary crystal, believe me. It is old, very old—it and the strangely wrought base of silver on which it stands. The inscriptions are in Sumerian cuneiform characters. It was ancient before the city of Ur. Of its origin I have no knowledge, but many years ago, in the year 1550, a traveler from Greece, who had found this crystal in the ruins of Delphi, sold it to a Frenchman named Michel de Nostredame."

"The crystal ball of Nostradamus," murmured Pons.

"At least he is not strange to you, Mr. Pons. And was not Nostradamus the most famous seer of all time? Did not his prophecies, one upon another, come true—centuries after he had set them down?"

"The fulfillment of prophecies, like beauty, is too often only in the eye of the beholder," replied Pons. "But I concede that the French physician offers as nearly adequate evidence for pre vision as I know."

"This is the original crystal ball and from it stems the information you seek. It was because of what I saw in the future that it became necessary for me to serve my race by destroying the young persons in whom you are interested."

"You wish us to believe that you hired assassins Verne in London, others elsewhere to murder harmless children because of what you saw in the ball of Nostradamus?" asked Pons, shaking his head gently. "Sir, I am no seer; I am but an humble practitioner of the art of ratiocination. This is beyond reason."

"Indeed it is," agreed Weddigan. "I repeat it. These children, Ossip Ciciorka, Terence Allen, Timor Gushenko but I need not name them; you know their names these children, I say, were destined to become the oppressors, the dictators, the mad dogs of tomorrow, the Mussolinis of their generation, to fire the earth with war and pestilence, to subjugate and degrade mankind to its lowest level. I failed in the case of the girl, Ana Rabinsohn; perhaps I shall have opportunity to try it again. There is but one more in London Josef Zollern. With your permission, I shall personally execute him."

"I regret our inability to aid your crime, Mr. Weddigan," said Pons.

"Stay a moment, sir. Will you look into the ball? Pray have no fear of chicanery. And you, Dr. Parker. And tell me in a moment or two what you see there."

Pons and I turned to the ball. And in a moment, scarcely more, the crystal had begun to cloud up, as if smoke had somehow entered the glass. I flashed a glance at our monstrous host, and saw him bent above the ball, his hands flat on either side of it, his head bowed, an expression of infinite sadness in his features. Then the ball drew me again, and I saw a scene beginning to take shape, as of a vast concourse of people, before whom stood a fair-haired young man wearing a scarlet tunic, haranguing them passionately and receiving their ovations. The impassioned orator bore a sabre-slash on his right cheek. All about hung the paraphernalia of tyranny. The scene held but briefly; then the clouds swirled up and it was gone.

"I know only too well what you saw, gentlemen," said Weddigan. He rose, clapping his hands.

The Mauritanian appeared almost instantly.

"Forgive me," said Weddigan, bowing once more, his eyes fixed upon some goal far beyond us. "I am an idealist, a perfectionist. I

wear a curse upon my soul." And to the servant he said, "Detain Mr. Pons and Dr. Parker for twenty minutes. I leave to protect the future."

The seer stepped behind the servant and vanished into the dark hangings along the wall. The Mauritanian resolutely barred our way, standing with folded arms before us, his sudden menace seeming to make of him a giant. And indeed, his shoulders were as broad as any I have seen, and his girth was in keeping. He weighed well over fifteen stone, and his aspect was formidable.

Neither of us made a move for several moments. Then suddenly Pons reached out, took up the crystal ball of Nostradamus, and at the same time came to his feet and flung the ball with all his might. The surprised Mauritanian fell without a cry, and the ball shattered when it struck the floor beyond the divan.

Pons leaped over the fallen servant and, without turning to see whether I was following, ran out into the hall to the lifts. In the foyer he found what he sought—a telephone directory of London.

"There is but one chance we may save the boy, Parker," he said. "Twenty minutes, Weddigan said. Let us see . . . Z . . . Zollern. Clapham, Kensal Rise, Norwood—these Zollerns are well over twenty minutes from Southampton Row. Camden Town. Count Helmut von and zu Zollern—he alone is within twenty minutes of these premises. Now, if only we can reach Jamison in time. . . ."

We sped toward Camden Town in a fortuitously discovered cab, and turned into a middle-class residential street just as the tall figure of Abraham Weddigan passed the flats housing the Zollern family we sought.

"Slow down, driver," said Pons.

Weddigan, having reached the end of the street, turned to walk back.

At that moment a small figure emerged from the flats and started across the street. At sight of him, Weddigan changed his pace to swerve toward the boy.

"Now!" cried Pons. "Pray heaven we are not too late! Driver, get down there at once."

Just as the driver started up, a Flying Squad car raced around the further corner and bore down upon Weddigan. The white face of Abraham Weddigan came up, his eyes widening as he saw the two cars coming toward him. His hand darted into his coat and brought out a stub-nosed pistol. He began to run toward the eleven-year-old.

The bulky figure of Inspector Jamison leaned from the window of the police car, heavy Webley in hand. Within the second it spoke sharply, once and again. Weddigan spun around and dropped to the street, his weapon skittering from his hand.

Pons, myself, and Jamison were out of our respective vehicles in a moment. We ran forward, while young Josef Zollern, who had turned at the excitement to look back, began to walk toward Weddigan's body. The four of us reached the scene almost together.

"Finished," said Jamison curtly. "Acting on your information, Pons. We've traced some of Verne's payments to Weddigan. A madman."

"It would seem so," replied Pons, gazing thoughtfully down at the fallen body. "Even if I find it difficult to forget how he spoke of Mussolini. There are more important things in government than making the trains run on time. . . ."

Josef Zollern, a pale, pinch-faced youngster, looked down at the corpse almost with contempt. Momentarily, a fire seemed to flash in the depths in his dark eyes.

"Young man, you were in danger," said Jamison with bluff heartiness.

The boy's lips were touched with disdain.

"I suppose that before my destiny is fulfilled, I shall see a good deal of this," he said shrilly. There was a cutting edge of fanaticism in his voice.

Pons gazed at him as if he had seen him for the first time.

The boy looked back with eyes that were proud and insolent. Then he turned and walked, quite self-possessed, back to the apartment house from which tenants were coming toward the scene.

Happily, that was the end of the inexplicable sequence of child murders which had shocked the Continent. With Weddigan's death, the case was closed, and so it is marked in the police files, despite Pons's annoying, "Only the future will tell, Parker."

A NOTE ON SOLAR PONS

Pons, Solar, born ca. 1880, in Prague. Son of Asenath Pons, consular official at Prague, and Roberta McIvor Pons, younger brother of Bancroft Stoneham, in His Majesty's Service. Public school education, Oxford *summa cum laude*, 1899. Unmarried. Member Savile, Diogenes, Athenaeum, Cliff Dwellers, Lambs. Est. private inquiry practise at 7B Praed Street, 1907. British Intelligence, World War I, II. Monographs, *An Inquiry into the Nan-Matal Ruins of Ponape* (1905), *A Logical Approach to the Science of Ratiocination* (1917), *The Chess Problem and the State of the Mind* (1919), *The Inductive Process* (1921), *On the Value of Circumstantial Evidence* (1925), *An Examination of the Cthulhu Cult and Others* (1931). Widely traveled. Residences: New York, Chicago, Paris, Vienna, Prague, Rome; 7B Praed Street, London, W.2. Telephone: Ambassador 10000.

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Derleth, A.
The Solar Pons omnibus
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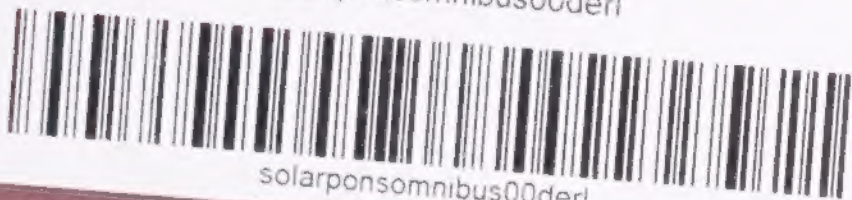
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